TRIGGER BERG AND THE TREASURE TREE

BY LEO EDWARDS

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TRIGGER BERG AND THE TREASURE TREE

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THE WILD MAN LET OUT A YELL FOR HELP.

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 32)

TRIGGER BERG
AND THE
TREASURE TREE

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF

THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY

BERT SALG

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TO

JOHN AND BOB
BEALE

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LEO EDWARDS' BOOKS

Here is a complete list of Leo Edwards' published books:

THE TRIGGER BERG SERIES

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree
Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps
Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig
Trigger Berg and the Cockeyed Ghost

THE JERRY TODD SERIES

Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy
Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure
Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen
Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog
Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg
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Andy Blake
Andy Blake's Comet Coaster
Andy Blake's Secret Service
Andy Blake and the Pot of Gold

TRIGGER BERG AND THE TREASURE TREE

CHAPTER I

WHOOPEE!

May 31—Whoopee! No more school for three months. And to-day is my birthday. Besides fifty cents my ma gave me a diary. I guess you know what a diary is. It's a book with no printing in it. All it has is covers and blank pages. You fill up the blank pages by writing down on them what you do each day. If you go to a fire or see a dog fight you put that down. And if it rains or snows you put that down, too, only, of course, it won't be snowing very soon around here, for it's summer.

I've already started my new diary as you can see. I'm telling what happened to me to-day. My pa is in Chicago. When he comes home I hope he buys me a swell birthday present. I usually get something nice when he

comes home from his business trips. That's the kind of a pa *he* is.

I've got a good ma, too, I want you to know. She's the best ma in Crocketville, Illinois, which is the name of the town where I live. I wouldn't trade her for Slat's ma or anybody else's ma. Slats is one of my best pals. We call him Slats because he's so skinny. Living in the same block, we also go to the same school when there is school. Just now, as I say, it's summer vacation and the schoolhouse is locked up. Boy, they can keep it locked up the year around for all of me. I can think of a million things that I like better than school. Still, I guess I'd rather go to school and learn something than be a dumb-bell all my life.

Slats' real name is John Beale. His pa owns a cement-block factory. There are four of us in our gang. After me comes Ronald Fish, whose nickname is Friday, because on Friday you always get fish, then Slats, whom I have mentioned, and last, Robert Beale, Slats' kid brother, who goes by the name of Tail Light, because, being the youngest and smallest, he always tags behind.

I'm kind of glad that I have a diary to write in. It's fun. My ma says that when I grow up the diary will mean a lot to me and I

wouldn't sell it for hundreds of dollars. Any time I'm in doubt about a word, she says, I'm to ask her and she'll tell me how to spell it. Using commas and periods, she says, is just like driving an automobile—when you slow up for a corner you use a comma, and when you stop you use a period. I find that it works all right. And if I write down everything just as I would tell it I guess I will get along all right. Anyway, I'm glad that my ma had the man print "Trigger" on the cover, instead of my real name, which is Henry.

June 1—My fifty cents is nearly gone. I bought one root beer for five cents. Then I bought twenty sticks of licorice for ten cents, which was two sticks for a penny. Then I bought a dish of ice cream for ten cents. And then I treated Friday and Slats to gumdrops, which was ten cents. So all I've got left is fifteen cents and a full stomach.

June 2—I was sick last night. I had an awful twisted-up feeling in my stomach. My ma got scared and sent for Doc Fosse. Doc says it was the licorice. He asked me how much I ate.

I told him twenty sticks. He looked at me kind of disgusted-like. I guess he thinks I ate too much. Twenty sticks, though, isn't such an awful lot. I remember one time when Friday ate thirty-two sticks. You can see what a big pig *he* is. I wouldn't eat thirty-two sticks and be a big pig. I don't think that I could eat thirty-two sticks, anyway. The best I can do is twenty-nine sticks. Still, I'm getting bigger every day.

I wish my pa would come home. If he stays away much longer he may forget all about my birthday.

June 3—I am all well again. It rained to-day. It rained day before yesterday, too, which was Saturday, only I forgot to write it down. Also I forgot to write down that I didn't go to Sunday School yesterday because I was sick. This morning I tracked mud in the kitchen and my ma scolded me. That is what a fellow gets in this world. One day he is sick and everybody honeys him. And the next day he gets yelled at.

June 4—I bought more licorice to-day with my fifteen cents. I had ten sticks and Friday

had ten sticks and Slats had ten sticks. Licorice, you know, makes a fellow's spit turn black. So we had a spitting contest on the side of Friday's house, which is painted white. Friday could spit the most but I could spit the highest. His ma surprised us, and you should have heard her jaw when she saw the side of the house. She made us get out the hose. And then she sent me home when I squirted water through the parlor window.

But if she really thinks that I am making a bad boy out of Friday, as she says, I wish she could have been over to my house the day he put the mud turtle under a pan on the kitchen floor. Mrs. Flora Gooble, the colored lady who does our washing, was there. And when she saw the pan walking around the floor, like it was bewitched, you should have seen her eyes pop out. She tells to this day that the pan had evil spirits under it. Friday is full of such tricks. And then to have his ma tell how I am leading him astray! That's funny. I guess she doesn't know him half as well as I do.

He sure is a good pal, though. The reason why he could spit the most in our licorice contest is because he has the biggest mouth. Once we bet him that he couldn't put a hen's egg in his mouth. He did. And then Slats punched

him under the chin. Gosh! Friday doesn't know to this day whether it was the egg shell that he choked on or one of his back teeth. I guess he was lucky, all right, that it wasn't a rotten egg, like the ones that we recently pitched at the Crooker gang. Golly Ned! We sure had fun that day. And Tony Crooker, the leader, got just what he deserved. For he's mean to us. He says his gang can lick us. One time he socked me on the back of the head with a rotten tomato.

June 5—Whoopee! I guess I'm pretty lucky. For a long time I've been wanting a new coaster wagon, and to-day when my pa came home from Chicago he took me down to Hans Olson's corner hardware store where they sell Comet Coasters. I picked out the coaster I wanted, which, of course, is the birthday present that I've been looking forward to.

Scooting down the street I almost bumped into a fat lady. Gee! I bet if I *had* bumped into her from behind, upsetting her on top of me, that would have been the end of me. My new Comet Coaster would have been squashed flat. Mr. Olson says it is guaranteed to hold up a thousand pounds. But I wouldn't be sur-

prised if the fat lady weighed a ton, which is two thousand pounds. I guess, though, that people don't weigh that much. Just elephants and hippopotamuses. Gee, that's a long word! I never wrote it down before. And I had to ask my ma how to spell it. In a few months she is going to look through my diary to see if I have done a good job with my spelling and punctuation, and if everything is all right she is going to take me up in Wisconsin to visit my Aunt Nellie, who lives on a farm. Once when I was there I tried to ride a tame goat. I guess, though, that the goat wasn't half as tame as I thought, or else he didn't like to have boys ride him. For the first thing I knew he knocked me through the side of Aunt Nellie's hen house. And for a week I was so sore I had to sit on a pillow.

Well, to get back to the fat lady, just as I swung around her, making her jump, along came Slats in his old coaster. And even though we are the best of pals, as I say, I could see right off that he was envious of me.

"It looks pretty," says he, kind of turning up his pug nose as though my shiny new Comet Coaster wasn't much. "But for that matter a pignut looks like a hickory nut. So

you can't always judge things by their looks."

"See how peachy it runs," says I, showing off the coaster's good points. "Notice the self-steering front axle. It's something special, Mr. Olson says. It's the best coaster on the market."

But Slats couldn't get over feeling kind of jealous.

"I bet I can beat you down Clarks Hill," says he, unwilling to admit that my new coaster was any better than his.

"Any old time," says I, and off we started for the big winding hill on the north side of town. On the way we picked up Friday, who told us, when we got to the top of the hill, that he would start us off. So we got ready, Slats in his old coaster and me in my new one, and Friday said "Go!"

Gee-miny crickets calico cats and horse radish with pants on! I never went so fast in all my life. I thought it would take a minute or two to get started, but I didn't know very much about roller bearings. Just as quick as scat I was going a hundred miles a minute. At least it seemed that fast to me. The roadside bushes scooted past me like a green streak. Grabbing the brake I gave it a yank. Then I didn't go quite so fast.

"Want me to give you a shove?" yelled Slats, thinking he could go faster than me. And, to that point, I want to tell you that he was cutting it down that old hill like a streak of blue lightning.

But I wasn't going to have him beat me, even though he was one of my best pals. You know how boys are. So I let go of the brake, just to show him how fast I really could go, and away I went down the hill, passing the other coaster as though it wasn't moving at all. That's what a Comet Coaster can do, with its roller bearings and rubber-tired wheels. Then I came to a sharp turn. And right there in the middle of the road was a team of horses hitched to a loaded hay cart. I put on the brake and stopped. But Slats didn't stop. He couldn't. To save himself he rolled into the roadside ditch, his coaster smashing into a hundred pieces.

The farmer was mad as hops because we had scared his horses.

"It serves you right," he told Slats. Getting down from the load of hay he gave the broken coaster a kick. I felt like giving him a kick. "You had no business coasting on this hill. It's a wonder my horses didn't run away. If they had, your parents would have paid the damages."

I was getting madder every minute.

"Oh, go tie a knot in a noodle, you old hay shaker," I spit out at him, taking Slats' side. Then I had to jump into my coaster and scoot, for he took after me.

Slats went home and told his pa.

"But why didn't you stop like Trigger?" says Mr. Beale.

"I couldn't," says Slats truthfully.

"Why not?"

"My brake slipped. It never was any good, anyway. It's a punk old brake."

"Trigger seems to have a good brake."

"Sure thing," says Slats sensibly, ready to admit now that my coaster was the best that money could buy. "Everything on his coaster is good. For he has a Comet Coaster."

"That being the case," says Mr. Beale, smiling, "I'll see if I can't buy you one just like it."

Well, to make a long story short, as the saying is, Mr. Beale took Slats downtown to Mr. Olson's store and bought him a Comet Coaster just like mine. And now Friday is going to get one and so is Tail Light. We're going to organize a Comet Coaster Club. I'm going to be captain, because I suggested it, and Slats is going to be assistant captain.

CHAPTER II

OUR NEW CLUB

June 6—Mr. Olson has sent to the Comet Coaster company for club membership blanks. We get them free. And later on, when we get our club organized, the company is going to send us a free magazine filled with coaster-wagon news. Mr. Olson told us that a whole book has been written about the Comet Coaster company. The title of the book is *Andy Blake's Comet Coaster*. Some day I'm going to get the book and read it. As I understand it, Andy Blake is a clever young man who writes advertisements. His nickname is Advertising Andy. He made a big blunder, though, when he wrote a lot of carriage advertisements. For nobody buys carriages. So, to save itself, the old carriage company that he was working for switched to coaster wagons. And Andy is the one, I'm told, who gave the new coaster its peachy name.

June 7—It rained to-day. I helped Friday clean out his hen house. He knows a swell trick with hens. Putting one's head under its wing he swung it around and around until it was dizzy. It would stay that way, he said, putting it on the floor, for several minutes. We had seven hens lying in a row when Mrs. Fish peeked into the hen house to see what we were doing. She thought, of course, that the hens were dead. And you should have heard her jaw. Then, when she found out that Friday was to blame, instead of me, she shook the stuffings out of him.

I tell Friday that when I go to visit my Aunt Nellie I'm going to experiment with her hens and see if I can't get some of them to lay three or four eggs a day. I'll watch them when they leave the nest. Then, by putting them to sleep, I'll make them think it's night. When they wake up they'll think it's morning and lay another egg. I bet my Aunt Nellie will be tickled if I can double her egg supply.

June 8—About all I've done to-day is scratch. It's chicken mites, Friday's ma says. We got them on us in the hen house, and they seem to hate to leave us. Maybe they're blind

and don't know that we aren't roosters. When my ma saw me scratching, and found out what was the matter with me, she almost had a fit, fearing that the mites would get loose in the house. But, as I say, if any have left me I haven't missed them. I wish about seventeen millions would leave me.

June 9—I went to Sunday School to-day. Nothing happened except that Noah built an ark and I got all the kids to scratching from watching me. The teacher thought I was trying to be smart, which shows you how easily a good boy can be misjudged.

Oh, yes, I started a new book this afternoon. And is it ever peachy! It's called *Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat.* Jerry is a swell kid. Like me, he lives in a small town. Other members of his gang are Scoop Ellery, Peg Shaw and Red Meyers. Peg is gritty and Red never gets enough to eat. He's funny. In the book an old geezer named Professor Ellsworth Stoner comes to town and hires the boys to help him run a "feline rest farm." That's what *he* calls it. A feline, you know, is a cat. So the boys laugh when the old man, who claims to be an authority on cats, tells how he

is going to get rich taking care of rich people's cats. Then, when an advertisement is put in the *Chicago Tribune,* the cats begin to arrive. And about the time the town is filled with cats something happens to the old professor. Gee! Did I ever laugh when I read about Jerry and his cats. There's a mystery, too; and the main part of the mystery is a rose-colored cat named Lady Victoria. Poor Lady Victoria! Something awful happens to her. You can bet your boots that hereafter when I buy a book it's going to be a "Jerry Todd" book, for there's a lot of peachy titles.

June 10—Whoopee! Our club membership blanks are here. We're all organized. And on Wednesday night, which is the day after tomorrow, we're going to have our first meeting. I can hardly wait.

June 11—I saw a rooster fight this morning. That's all I know of that happened to-day except that Friday got hooked on a picket fence. He made such a big hole in the seat of his pants that he had to walk home in a barrel.

Speaking of barrels, there's one in the story

that I'm reading about Jerry Todd. And is it ever funny where Jerry and the barrel roll down the hill! Gee! There's a ghost in the story, too, only of course, it isn't a real ghost. It's Peg dressed up like a ghost. Queer things happen to him, all right.

CHAPTER III

HELPING THE POOR AND NEEDY

JUNE 12. We had the first meeting of our Comet Coaster club to-night in Friday's barn, which is all fixed up swell with four soap boxes for seats and a cow's skull over the door. When we made up our secret signs we swore on a Bible that we would never reveal any of these vital secrets to anybody outside of our club, only it was a doctor book that we swore on, which was just as good as a Bible. The part of the doctor book that we kissed was where a man was having his insides cut out, Friday having colored the picture with red ink to make it look like blood.

During the meeting, Slats got up and said that we ought to put our minds on something bigger than just coasting down Clarks' Hill. Every club, he said, had a noble purpose and an uplifting thought.

That kind of talk was too deep for me.

"What do you mean?" says I.

"Suppose," says he, "that our uplifting thought is to help the poor and needy."

"That's me," piped up Friday. "I need an ice-cream cone. So get busy and help me."

"Shut up," says Slats. "We're talking business."

"There's two kinds of business I like," says Friday. "Eating and lots of it."

"Tell us next," says Slats, "that there's two kinds of things in your head."

"What are they?" says Friday, grinning.

"Nothing and lots of it."

That started them to chewing the rag. So, as captain, I rapped for order.

"Brother Slats has the floor," says I. "Let him talk till he runs down. Maybe if he has the floor long enough we'll understand what he's talking about."

That led Slats back to his "uplifting thought."

"We can use our Comet Coasters," says he, "and pick up coal along the railroad track."

"And then what?" says I.

"We'll put the coal in somebody's coal house."

"And who gets the money?" says I.

"What money?" says he.

"The money for the coal," says I.

"There isn't going to be any money," says he.

"We'd be crazy," says I, "to pick up coal and give it away."

"As I told you," Friday again stuck in his bazzoo, "if you want to help the poor and needy start in on me. I don't want coal, though—I want ice cream."

"We'll fill Mrs. Camel's coal house first," says Slats. "For she's as poor and needy as anybody I know of."

Mrs. Camel is a nice old lady. One time when I was sick she brought me some red jam and I got it all over the white bedspread. I kind of liked the idea of picking up coal for her. I saw now, all right, what Slats meant by an uplifting thought.

We ended our meeting with bananas and a nice brotherly scrap between Slats and Tail Light over their caps. I'm glad I haven't got a brother with a head the same size as mine.

June 13—I haven't much pep to-night. I suppose a fellow ought to be happy who is captain of a Comet Coaster club and has a slick Comet Coaster like me. I don't feel happy, though. I guess not. I feel anything but

happy. My ma is all out of patience with me. So is my pa. They say I'm a problem. I don't know what they mean by that. I always thought that a problem was something in an arithmetic book.

We got together this morning, the four of us, with Tail Light, of course, tagging behind, and went to the railroad track to look for coal. But we didn't find much. Then when we came to the old cement mill, which isn't used any more except as a storehouse for old iron such as Mr. Charley Dornick uses in his blacksmith shop, what should we see in the middle of the floor but a big pile of coal! The door was unlocked, which showed plainly enough that the coal wasn't of any use to anybody.

So we filled our wagons and went down the street to where Mrs. Camel lives by herself in a little low-roofed house near the creek. No one in town claims to be any poorer than she is. Almost every day she puts out a big washing in her back yard. That is the way she earns a living, which is a pretty hard way, I've heard my ma say. Sometimes I drop in at Mrs. Camel's house when she has a fresh batch of cookies on hand and help her crank the washing machine. It doesn't hurt a fellow to do a good turn like that. You feel happy after-

wards. And cookies are cookies. Right now I felt happy in bringing her free coal. She didn't need it now, but she would make good use of it when winter came. I guess we surprised her with our free coal. She said we were little angels, only she hoped our mothers wouldn't trounce us for getting dirty. We unloaded the coal in her coal house and she gave us three cookies apiece. Then we went back to the old cement mill for more coal. We hauled coal all the afternoon. It was hard work. But we kept thinking that it was a good deed. And then it didn't seem quite so tiresome.

Going home to supper, my ma took one horrified look at me and then threw up her hands.

"What in the name of common sense has happened to you?" says she. "Did you fall down somebody's chimney?"

"I've been doing a good turn," says I proudly, "and hauling coal for the poor and needy."

"Hauling coal! Your clothes look it. I have a notion to warm you up with a stick. The idea of a boy of your age coming home looking like the inside of a furnace pipe."

"Gee whizz!" says I. "Don't you want me to grow up and do good deeds and have uplifting thoughts?"

"Of course," says she, looking kind of dizzy. "But the next time you get an uplifting thought, for mercy's sake don't get chummy with a coal pile."

She helped me clean up. Then my pa came home.

"Charley Dornick is on the warpath," says he. "He had some special forge coal stored in the old cement mill. And to-day four kids lugged it off. There's liable to be trouble."

Gee-miny crickets! I got sick all over.

My ma gave me a queer look.

"Ask your young son about the coal," says she. "I think he can tell you all about it."

Getting my story of Slats' uplifting thought, and how we took the coal for Mrs. Camel because she was poor and needy, my pa put his own talker to work, saying among other things that I could have another uplifting thought and haul the coal back where I got it. Then I was sent to bed without any supper. It's tough not to have supper, especially when a fellow has been hauling coal. I never was so hungry in all ny life. I guess if I were going to die I wouldn't want to starve to death. I'd rather be hung or shot. I wonder if Friday's pa sent him to bed. I wonder if Slats' and Tail Light's pa sent them to bed, too. I hope so.

(An hour later.) I'm not so unlucky after all. When my ma came upstairs to bed she stopped in my room, where I was dying of starvation. Sitting down on the edge of the bed she kissed me. I was a worry to her, she said, but, after all, she guessed God made me just the way He wanted me to be and it wasn't for her to find fault with the job He did, after which she gave me a cheese sandwich and an apple. Hearing voices below I asked her who was down there talking to my pa, hoping, of course, that it wasn't the town policeman. It was Friday's pa and Slats' pa, I was told.

June 14—Whoopee! We don't have to haul the coal back. When Slats' pa and Friday's pa came to our house last night, to sort of check up on us and compare notes, Slats' pa said we had good intentions but our judgment was bad. And having had our lesson, wouldn't it be a proper neighborly act, he suggested, to pay for the coal and make Mrs. Camel a present of it? Friday's pa said that was a fine suggestion, and the three men passed around the hat, each putting in his part of the pay for the coal.

June 19—Nothing happened yesterday or for several days except that I have finished the "cat" story and am now on chapter six of *Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy.* To-night we're going to have another meeting of our Comet Coaster club. Slats has a new idea. He told us about it this afternoon when we were catching flies for his pet toad. It isn't an uplifting thought this time. I guess if he has any more uplifting thoughts we'll uplift him with the toe of our shoes. He's got a scheme to make money. Maybe we'll soon be rich like the Ringling brothers, who own a big circus. For Slats' idea is to put cages on our Comet Coasters, for a street parade, to be followed by a circus in Friday's barn. Friday is the homeliest, so we're going to let him be the Wild Man of Borneo. We're going to make a cage for him and have him in the parade. It's a swell scheme, I think. To-morrow night I'll write down the rest of our plans.

CHAPTER IV

THE WILD MAN OF BORNEO

June 20. I haven't told my ma about our circus. Nor my pa, either. It's going to be a pretty slick circus, all right. We talked it over last night at our club meeting in Friday's barn. Just as we decided yesterday, Friday is going to be the Wild Man of Borneo. He is going to eat raw meat, growling and gnashing his teeth and grabbing the bars of his cage.

My ma says raw meat is what makes cats have fits. But one time at our house what she thought was cat fits wasn't that at all. It was Indian pain killer. I got it in the cat's milk by mistake. Then, when the cat began to act up, my ma thought it was having fits. It hunched up its back, like a hairy rainbow, and opened its mouth, as though it was anxious to turn inside out and get the inside part cool. Then it gave an awful yowl and jumped into my pa's lap as he sat reading the newspaper. From his lap it jumped to the top of his head, where there isn't much hair, after which it

scooted into the parlor, knocking my ma's and pa's wedding picture off the center table and breaking a vase that my ma won at a card party. My pa tried to grab the cat, and it clawed him on the hands. Then my ma swiped at the cat with a broom, hitting my pa plunk in the face. That made him mad. The cat got away through the screen door, leaving a big hole.

My ma said it was fits that made the cat act that way. I didn't say anything. With my pa all banged up, and the card-party vase in pieces, I thought I better keep still about the Indian pain killer. The point is, as you can see, that what looks like the fits isn't always fits. Sometimes it's pain killer, or something.

I wonder if Friday will have fits from eating raw meat. I hope not. I guess I'll ask my pa what to do for people when they have fits. Maybe we ought to be prepared for the worst.

We're planning to meet at Friday's house to make the cage, because it is in his barn that we're going to have the circus. There's a big box in the barn. It will make a dandy cage. I hope Friday gets to be a raw meat eater pretty soon. For as soon as he can eat raw meat we're going to have the circus.

Boy, is that *Whispering Mummy* book ever

getting spooky! Yet it's funny, too. For Jerry and his gang, as Juvenile Jupiter Detectives, disguise themselves with false whiskers and knock an old geezer on the head. Jerry's a hero, all right!

June 21—We've got the cage all made. It's pretty slick, I want to tell you. It's like a big box with slats for sides. One side is bolted to my Comet Coaster and the other side is bolted to Slats' Comet Coaster. We have a rope in front to pull it by, and I'm going to do the pulling while Slats does the yelling. Here is the sign we painted:

DODO

The Wild Man of Borneo

This afternoon while we were at work in the barn Friday's ma came out to see what the racket was all about. Told that we were going to have a circus, she began worrying right away for fear that Ronald, as she calls him, would skid off a trapeze, or something, and crack his neck.

"Oh," says Slats, laughing, "there's nothing dangerous about his job. You needn't worry about him."

"Well," says she, suddenly remembering about supper, "he can let his job rest, whatever it is, and scoot down to the butcher shop with this quarter and get his pa some beefsteak."

We were tickled. Everything was coming our way. Now Friday would have a chance to practice eating raw meat, for, of course, his ma wouldn't miss a few bites. So we went with him to the butcher shop and got the meat, after which we stopped in an alley where Friday unwrapped the meat and took a squint at it. He didn't look very pleased.

"I guess," says he, "I'll let Slats be the Wild Man of Borneo, and I'll take some other part."

"*Me?*" says Slats, letting out his neck.

"Sure thing. I don't want to be selfish."

"Go lay an egg," says Slats. "You're the homeliest. So why spoil a good thing?"

"I don't know as I'm any homelier than you are," says Friday, getting huffy. "If you ever took any beauty prizes I never heard about it."

"Anyway," says Slats, "you've got the biggest front teeth." Then, in his slick way, he told Friday to buck up and be brave, because everybody cheered brave men, like Lindbergh, and gave them medals.

So Friday got real brave, wanting to be like

Lindbergh, and bit into one corner of his pa's beefsteak. Slats got hold of the beefsteak and pulled, with me helping Friday, who hung on like a bulldog, and we pulled so hard we almost pulled the meat eater's teeth out. The beefsteak was stretched out a yard long.

Friday got mad. He'd be darned if he was going to be Dodo the Wild Man, he spit, if he had to eat leather. The old circus could go to pot, he spit some more. We told him then, not wanting to lose him, that we would get him some hot dogs to eat.

When we heard that his ma was going to be away from home to-morrow afternoon we kind of rushed things to have the circus then, so as not to bother her with our yelling. We've got a bill posted on the barn telling about the six big acts that we're going to put on for five cents. I got some of my pa's shoe blacking to put on Friday to make him look like a wild man. He is going to wear my swimming trunks. The trunks and the shoe blacking spots is all he's going to have on except some hair twisters to make his hair stand up, and a ring tied to each of his ears. Slats is going to perform in tights, on a trapeze, and I'm going to be a clown and sing a song. Here's the song I'm going to sing:

I woke up in the morning and looked upon
the wall,
The cooties and the bedbugs were having a
game of ball,
The score was six to nothing, the cooties were
ahead,
The bedbugs knocked a home-run and I fell
clean out of bed.

If I don't get killed before I come to the end of the first song I may sing this one, too:

I went to the animal fair,
The birds and the beasts were there,
By the light of the moon the old baboon
Was combing his auburn hair.
The monk fell out of his bunk
Right onto the elephant's trunk,
The elephant sneezed and fell on his knees,
And what became of the monk, monk, monk?

Tail Light is going to speak a piece. It takes him about an hour to say it. I'll see if I can remember it:

There was a boy in our town
And he was wondrous wise,
He could unscramble scrambled eggs
And uncuss custard pies.

There was a man in our town
Whose mantelpiece was bare.
His head looked just like heaven
For there was no parting there.

On a mountain tall and lofty
  In a distant foreign land,
An Arab chief in crimson robes
  Did keep a peanut stand.

The Captain was real fond of froth,
  So when the storm was near,
He watched the foam with happy thought—
  'Twas brewing Hire's root beer.

The sea was rough, 'twas very rough,
  The waves were very wild.
A mermaid cried, staccato voice:
  "Oh, fireman, save my chi-ild!"

"We're lost!" the Captain shouted
  As he staggered down the stair.
"If that's the case," the mermaid said,
  "Please hand me back my fare."

A parrot green in a gilded cage
  Was hanging 'neath a tree,
He gave three healthy, happy cheers,
  But never a word quoth he.

A dog, a cat, a cow and a goat
  Got into an awful fight.
They tried to chew each other up—
  They were an awful sight.

The farmer picked them up
  And made them into hash,
He sold them in the city then
  For fifty dollars cash.

Upon a winter's evening,
  Toward the close of last July,
I went to gather roses,
  As the day was hot and dry.

It had rained that very morning
  And the wind did howl and blow,
But I couldn't find my snowshoes
  So I let the roses grow.

CHAPTER V

POOR FRIDAY!

JUNE 22—We didn't have our circus to-day. I guess we are all out of luck. Friday is, anyway. He has a big bump on his head where he landed in the ditch, and the shoe blacking won't come off. He's a sight. I'm glad it isn't me.

When his ma drove away in her automobile this afternoon we helped him into his trunks and put the shoe blacking on him. We didn't put it on him solid, just spots here and there, about an inch apart, all over his body. By twisting our thumbs in the blacking, and then twisting them on Friday's skin, we could rub the blacking in dandy. When we got through with him he was the spottiest wild man you ever set eyes on. Slats led the parade, ringing a cowbell to attract attention. I followed, pulling the cage, then came the Wild Man in the cage, and last, of course, came Tail Light, hauling a cageful of borrowed cats.

"Look this way, ladies and gents," yelled

Slats, just like a real showman, "and feast your amazed eyes on the greatest natural curiosity of the age—Dodo, the Wild Man, who was captured by elephant hunters in the jungles of Borneo, and who eats nothing but raw meat."

The kids came running. And when they were close to the big cage Friday gave a screech, like his throat was cut, and jumped at them, hissing and snarling. We went all over town. At the top of Clarks Hill I told Slats to hold the rope while I took a rest. But he misunderstood me, I guess, or was careless. Anyway, the Wild Man let out a yell for help. There was a rumble of wheels, too. And when I looked around Dodo was halfway down the steep hill. We took after him, only I couldn't run very fast on account of my clown suit, which was baggy around the legs. I thought of the day Slats and I raced down the hill. And then, just as Slats had done, Friday came to grief in the roadside ditch, with everything piled on top of him.

An automobile stopped to view the wreck. It was Mrs. Fish and my ma and Slats' ma. They were headed for a party at one of the houses on the hill.

My ma almost stared her eyes out.

"Good heavens!" says she. "It's my Henry."

"Yes," says Slats' ma, "and it's my John and my Bobbie."

"If your boys are in it," says Friday's ma, "my Ronald's in it, too. I remember now they did say something about a circus. This must be it. Where's Ronald?" she says to us. "What have you done with him?"

Just then Friday crawled out of the ditch. He sure looked hard. His earrings were bent and he had a big hole in his trunks where he might better not have had a hole. Gee! I was glad it wasn't me. Ordering him to get into the automobile, so people couldn't see him, his ma angrily drove home, where she shoved a bar of soap and a scrubbing brush at him, telling him if he wasn't clean when she got back from the party she'd clean him with a stick.

When we got there Friday was scared. We told him not to be scared. We'd help him wash off the shoe-blacking spots, we said. But the spots wouldn't wash off. Nor did scouring powder do any good. I remembered then that it was a special kind of shoe blacking that some friend of my pa's had sent to him from Italy.

My ma isn't home yet. I suppose she is hav-

ing a good time at the party. And when she comes home she will tell my pa on me. I suppose my pa will be all out of patience with me when he finds out that it is his special shoe blacking that Friday has on him. I feel sorry for poor Friday. It's bad enough to be scolded, but it's a whole lot worse to be covered with shoe-blacking spots. Maybe we ought to change his nickname and call him Spotty. I guess, though, Friday is the best nickname. He sure looks funny. I suppose after a while the spots will sort of wear off, like walnut stains on a fellow's hands. I'm glad it isn't me.

(Same day.) Whoopee! I'm pretty lucky. My pa didn't scold me very much. When he heard about Friday being spotted up with shoe blacking he just laughed. My ma says she can't help feeling sorry for Mrs. Fish, but it certainly was a lucky day for the Berg family when the Wild Man job was wished onto Friday and not me.

I'm kind of anxious for morning to come so I can see Friday. I asked my pa how long it would take for the shoe-blacking spots to wear off and he said Friday ought to be his natural color again by Christmas time.

Gee!

June 23—Sunday afternoon. Nothing much happened to-day. It was raining when I got up. Right after breakfast I wanted to go over to Friday's house and see how he was coming along with his spots. But my ma told me sharply to stay at home and mind my own business. Mr. and Mrs. Fish, she said, were mad enough as it was over the way we had put shoe-blacking spots all over Friday without me going over there to remind them of their family disgrace.

When it came time for me to go to Sunday School the rain came down harder than ever, so I stayed at home and cleaned my Comet Coaster. First I cleaned the body, polishing it with some of my pa's automobile polish. I polished the wheel hubs, too. I tell you the coaster looked slick when I got through with it. Just like new. Then, to finish off, I removed the wheels and cleaned the roller bearings with gasoline, putting in new grease.

We had fried chicken for dinner. Um-yum! I wish we had fried chicken every day. My pa says if I behave the rest of the day and don't get into any scrapes he'll buy ice cream for supper.

I think I'll be able to finish the *Whispering Mummy* book to-night. Boy, is it ever exciting! I wonder if it was that old mummy that Jerry

heard when he was in the museum. But where did it go to?—that's what gets me.

June 24—I was good all day Sunday and we had ice cream for supper. My ma said it was a happy day for her. She was scared to have anyone touch her, she said, for fear she would wake up and find that it was all a wonderful dream. My pa said it hardly seemed like home, with none of the neighbors running in to tell him that I had snitched their coal pile or had put on a shoe-polishing stunt with one of their offspring. But he grinned at me when he said it. I guess when he was a boy he was a high-stepper, and hence understands boys pretty well. I like my pa a lot. He likes me a lot. He doesn't need to tell me about it. I can just feel it when he's near me.

Friday couldn't leave his front yard to-day. His ma wouldn't let him. She gave me an awful sour look when I went over there. I guess Friday told her that it was my pa's Italian shoe blacking that we used on him. Slats and Tail Light were there with their Comet Coasters. We had fun. Friday still has the most of his spots. He looks funny. We had to laugh at him. But he didn't laugh.

We decided not to have a club meeting to-

night. We're going to wait till Friday's ma gets over being mad and lets him leave the yard. Maybe then we'll be pirates. Slats has been reading a pirate book. He told us about it to-day when we were playing "Monkey" in Friday's cherry tree, only we didn't hear his whole story in the tree because our weight was too much for the limb and suddenly we landed kerplunk on the ground. That is, Tail Light landed on the ground and I landed on top of him. He went home and told his ma that I bent his nose out of shape. But I couldn't help it.

Slats says it's fun to be pirates. We can dig a cave and live in it, holding up people and burying our gold and jewels in the cave floor. Maybe we can have a club meeting Wednesday night. Friday thinks his ma will be all right by then.

June 26—I skipped yesterday. I almost to-day, too, for nothing happened worth writing down. Friday is still a prisoner in his yard. But his ma doesn't glare at us now when we go over there. So I guess he'll be free to-morrow.

June 27—Whoopee! We're going to be pirates. I'm tickled. Of course, I haven't told either my ma or my pa, as we're going to keep it a secret. And maybe we'll be pirates for years and years, a terror to the country, and nobody will ever suspect that it was Friday and me and Slats and Tail Light. We're going to wear black masks and live in a cave, just as Slats told us about. We took a vote at our club meeting last night and everybody voted "yes." Tail Light didn't want to vote "yes," but we told him if he didn't we'd shove him out of the club. As Slats says, the members of a club should stand together.

We are going to dig our cave in Crooked Hollow, where Mr. Dawson, the old miser, keeps his cows fenced in. Nobody ever goes there much. We are going to make wooden guns and bows and arrows. I guess we are going to be awful busy getting ready to be pirates. I wonder how much gold we'll get. Maybe tons and tons. We can haul it into our cave in our coasters. Being pirates is Slats' scheme, as I have written down, so I suppose he knows where we are going to get the gold. To-morrow night I'll write down how we come out with our cave. And when we begin burying our gold I'll write that down, too, only I'll have to make

up some kind of a secret code, so that no one will be able to read what I write down unless he has the proper key. That will be fun. I wish it was morning. I want to hurry up and dig the cave so that we can begin burying our gold.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot to write down about the one-legged man that I saw last night when I was coming home from our club meeting. He tried to stop me but I beat it for home. He sure looked hard, all right. I told my pa when I got home. And he said I did right to run, for men like that, he said, often misuse boys. Later my pa went down the street looking for the tramp but couldn't find him. He had one good leg and one wooden leg—like the Sea Cook in *Treasure Island.*

CHAPTER VI

THE STOLEN MONEY BOX

June 28—Nine o'clock Friday night. My pa just got home from downtown. When he came in I listened to see if I could hear the rustle of a paper bag, thinking that he might have brought home some candy or oranges, and then I heard him tell my ma that they haven't caught the robber yet. They haven't got track of Mr. Dawson's box of money, either.

All day to-day Friday and the rest of us have been searching for the box of money. We looked all over Mr. Dawson's yard and in the lilac bushes near his front fence and back of the barn. We have been hunting for the money instead of digging our pirate cave.

My pa says he heard that there is as much as five thousand dollars in the tin box, all in greenbacks and gold and silver. A known miser, as I say, Mr. Dawson lives all alone in a tumble-down house near Crooked Hollow, which is the place that we picked out for our pirate cave. I was always kind of scared of

him. For he has beady black eyes and wears whiskers all over his face. He looks dirty, too. I guess he wishes now that he had kept his money in the Crocketville savings bank, where a man should keep his money, and not in his cellar floor in a tin box.

To-day everybody in town was talking about the robbery. Slats says that maybe the one-legged tramp that I saw the night of our club meeting is the robber. He sure looked like a robber, all right. There's a reward of two hundred dollars for anyone who can get the money back or tell who stole it.

June 29—Saturday evening. They haven't found Mr. Dawson's money yet. Nor have they caught the robber. We are going to start digging our cave next Monday. We are going to haul the shovels and picks in my Comet Coaster. Probably we won't take more than one coaster to Crooked Hollow, as it is sandy there, and pulling a coaster up and down hillside cow paths is hard work. Slats and Tail Light brought their shovels over to my house to-day. Friday couldn't come over. His ma is trying out a new kind of laundry soap on him. He says if she doesn't let up pretty soon he won't

have any skin left. I wonder how he'd look if his ma did rub his skin off. Maybe he wouldn't look like himself at all and we wouldn't even recognize him.

June 30—To-day was Sunday again. Nothing happened. It didn't rain like it did last Sunday so I had to go to Sunday School. All the fellows were talking about the robbery. I don't remember what the lesson was about. Rogue Isham swallowed his penny. That's one way, my pa said, when I told him about the lost penny, for a fellow always to have money. But what he said doesn't make sense to me. For what good is a penny inside of a fellow if he can't spend it? He might just as well not have a penny. Still, maybe Rogue could get his penny back if he had someone stand him on his head and shake him.

Which reminds me of the Sunday I stood Friday on his head behind the church organ, where Slats and I were supposed to take turns pumping. I never dreamed, though, that Friday had a white mouse in his pocket until it got away from us. Mrs. Wadlow was singing a song, with her mouth opened up like a cave and her head thrown back. When she sings she

rips it out like an old rusty buzz saw. Just as she got up in the air about fifteen miles with her high notes the mouse ran out to take a peek at her, wondering, I guess, where all the noise was coming from, and then, let me tell you, there was some excitement. *Screech?* Say, you could have heard her a mile away. The congregation, I guess, thought that she had swallowed some of her fancy notes and was strangling on them. Then she yelled: "A mouse! A mouse!" and skittered behind the organ. The girl playing the pipe organ turned to see what was going on. And when she saw the mouse she pulled out a lot of stops, or something, that made the organ sound like a giant dying with the green-apple colic. I tell you it was exciting. But Friday and I had a hard time convincing our parents that we didn't loosen the mouse on purpose. Much as we like fun we wouldn't have done that. For boys shouldn't do such things in church.

July 1—I'm awfully tired to-night in my arms and legs. My back is lame, too. It's hard work digging a cave. To-morrow we are going to put a board ceiling in our cave, because the sand keeps dropping down in chunks. To-day a big gob fell on Slats. All we could see stick-

ing out was his arms and legs. He looked like a big spider.

To get into the cave, which is big enough to hold all four of us, we crawl through a tunnel about four feet long. That is the best way to dig a hidden cave, Slats says. The tunnel is small, just big enough for us to crawl through on our hands and knees. Slats, who is bossing the job, says we mustn't walk on the ground over the tunnel or else the whole works will cave in. Twice to-day we had to chase Mr. Dawson's cows away. Boy, it wouldn't be very lucky for us to be in the tunnel and have an old cow put her feet through the ceiling. I guess not.

I've been too busy lately to read books. But I'm going to finish that *Whispering Mummy* book pretty soon. For I'm crazy to find out what made the mummy whisper, and where it disappeared to. I want to find out the truth, too, about that old geezer who sold the boys the detective badges. In the middle of the book he tells the boys that he's a mummy inspector. But I don't swallow that.

July 2—I'm so excited to-night I can hardly hold my pen. I never had so many things happen to me in a single day in all my life. My

pa says he is proud of me. Yet it's a wonder to him, he says, that I'm alive.

I suppose I had better start in at the beginning. This morning we went out to Crooked Hollow to finish our cave. We hauled a lot of boards from dry-goods boxes for the cave ceiling and by noon we had the ceiling all in. Coming back after dinner we set to work on a blind for the mouth of the tunnel. And then who should show up but the robber himself! I mean the tramp with the wooden leg. He came up the hollow from the railroad track, keeping out of sight behind the bushes, and squinting back to see if he was being followed.

Coming closer and closer, he finally stopped under a dead oak tree and began digging in the sand. My heart went thump! thump! thump! For I knew, all right, as did my excited chums, what he was digging for. It was the box of money that he had buried in the hollow until he had a chance to get away with it without being caught.

But instead of being scared like the rest of us, Slats was kind of tickled.

"Now's our chance," says he.

"Chance for what?" says Friday.

"Our chance to be pirates," says Slats.

"What do you mean?" says Friday, looking

kind of wild-eyed as he began to guess, like the rest of us, what the leader meant.

"We've got to get the box of money away from the robber," says Slats.

"Someone give me a boost," says Friday, "so that I can climb on the moon and sneeze."

"We can do it," Slats hung on.

"Yah," says Friday, "and we can get a biff on the head, too, and a kick in the seat of the pants."

"Come on," says I, wanting to play safe. "Let's beat it for town and sound the alarm."

"Not on your life," says Slats. "I came here to be a pirate and now I'm going to be a pirate."

"You'll be a dead pirate," says Friday, "if you tackle that old geezer. For men with wooden legs are hard."

By this time the robber had dug a deep hole. We saw him reach into the hole. And when he straightened he had a box in his hands. We knew, all right, that it was Mr. Dawson's money box. And were we ever excited! There he was with the stolen money. And there we were secretly watching him.

"We've got to act quick," says Slats.

"Well," piped up Tail Light, "I'm ready to run whenever you are."

"Run, your granny," says Slats. Then he turned to Friday. "Are the black spots still on your body?"

"Sure thing," says Friday.

"Fine," says Slats. "Now yank off your clothes and pull your hair down over your eyes. Act like you did in the circus parade. See? We'll make the robber think that you're a real wild man. So the wilder you act the better."

There was some quick talk then as the leader told us his full scheme. Friday nodded, meaning that he understood. Stripping off his clothes he let out an awful screech and chased us out of the cave. When I squinted back over my shoulder he was dancing around in front of the cave. He sure looked like a wild man, all right. I never saw such a sight!

"Wild man! Wild man!" we yelled, beating it down the hill to where the robber was.

"What are you kids doing here?" he growled at us, hiding the money box under his coat.

"There's a wild man up there in a cave," says Slats.

"A wild man, eh? I suppose you expect me to believe that."

"Look!" pointed Slats. "There he is now."

"Um. . . . Git out of my way."

"Aren't you going to help us capture him?"

WE HAULED HIM TO TOWN IN MY COMET COASTER.

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"I haven't got time to monkey with you crazy kids," says the man, starting off in the direction of the railroad track.

But is Slats ever bright! Oh, baby!

"Say, mister," says he, "when you see the posse down there around the bend, will you please send them up here to help us capture the wild man?"

The tramp stopped.

"Posse?" says he, giving Slats a searching look. "What posse do you mean?"

"Why," says Slats, "the posse down near the railroad track that's trailing the robber who stole Mr. Dawson's money."

The tramp looked scared.

"Wouldn't it be fun," Slats kind of baited him along, "to pretend that we're the robber and hide in the cave with the wild man. We'd fool the posse; and later on we could sell the wild man to a circus for a lot of money."

The robber squinted down the hollow as though he expected to see a lot of men with guns, never dreaming, of course, that Slats had made up the story. And lucky for us a stray dog came into sight.

"How about this cave that you mentioned?" says the man quickly. "Is it big enough for us to hide in?"

"Oh, yes!" says Slats. "Come this way," he guided, starting up the hill.

When we got inside of the cave Friday wasn't there, which, of course, was the way Slats had planned it. *We* knew that Friday was waiting up above for the signal to jump on the roof of the tunnel and cave it in. But the robber didn't know that.

"The wild man must have escaped," says Slats. "Maybe we had better go outside and search for him."

The robber headed us off.

"Oh, no, you don't," says he. "While that posse is out there you're going to stay right where you are."

Gee! He looked so fierce that I was scared. And for a moment or two I thought how awful it would be for us if our scheme fizzled. But Slats wasn't scared.

"Listen," says he, putting a hand to his ear.

"What do you hear?" says the man.

"Voices," says Slats, acting as though he really had heard something. "It must be the posse."

Getting down on his stomach the robber crawled into the tunnel to take a squint. Here was our chance! "Wild man!" yelled Slats, which was the signal to Friday. And quick as

scat the whole top of the tunnel caved in on top of the robber. There he was, held as tight as you please, about a ton of sand on top of him, his mismatched legs sticking out at the end where we were and his hands sticking out at the other end. All we had to do was to dig our way out, which was easy, and tie his hands and feet, after which we hauled him to town in my Comet Coaster.

The money was untouched. And having learned a lesson, Mr. Dawson took his greenbacks and gold pieces to the bank. We, of course, will get the reward. Two hundred dollars! Just think of that! As yet we haven't decided how we'll spend the money. But we're going to give up being pirates. For my pa says it's against the law to be pirates, and we don't want to break the law and go to jail like the one-legged tramp did.

As I sit in my room writing this in my diary Friday is standing on his head in my bed, yelling to me to hurry and get through. He is staying with me to-night. It is thundering down by the river. I guess we are going to have a bad storm. I can hear my ma closing the windows.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN WE LOST OUR PANTS

JULY 3—It was thundering when Friday and I went to sleep last night. Pretty soon an old gee-whacker of a thunder crash came. Seven powder blasts touched off together couldn't have stirred up a bigger noise. I was wide awake in an instant. And my heart was going thump! thump! thump!

"Gee-miny crickets!" says Friday, grabbing my arm. "What blew up?"

We sat there listening to the rain as it beat against the bedroom windows. Once there was a splintering crash as the wind wrecked a limb and sent it crash-bang against the side of the house. Lucky for us, though, the whole tree didn't tip over.

"I bet the old creek is humping," says Friday.

"Maybe there'll be another flood," says I.

The creek that runs past Mrs. Camel's house isn't very big. But when there's a cloudburst it boils over its banks and floods the whole town,

leaving mud everywhere. It is a lot of fun when there's a flood. For the old wooden sidewalks make peachy rafts.

"I know what I'm going to do to-morrow," says Friday.

"What?" says I.

"I'm going to build a raft," says he. "There's a big pile of old railroad ties on the creek bank near Mrs. Camel's house. And railroad ties make peachy rafts."

"Golly Ned" says I. "That will be fun."

Getting up at seven o'clock we started for the creek as soon as breakfast was over. Pretty soon we came to a big mud puddle in the middle of the street. And daring me to follow him, Friday ran through the puddle lickety-split. Boy, that was fun! So we ran through the puddle several times, getting our knee pants splattered with mud.

Realizing that his ma would scold if he got any more mud on his pants, Friday rolled them up as high as he could, which was pretty high. With his square-cut coat buttoned around him, and his underwear tucked up out of sight, he looked as though he hadn't any pants on at all.

"Come on," says he, when I laughed at him. "Roll up yours the same way."

Which I did.

We were having fun in the puddle when Miss Tidy Sweet and Mrs. Wheeler came along.

"For goodness sake," says Miss Tidy Sweet, "will you look at those shameless boys, Mrs. Wheeler. They haven't any pants on. And playing right here in a public street!"

"Shocking," says Mrs. Wheeler.

"Their mothers ought to know about this," says Miss Tidy Sweet, giving us a scowl.

"Who are they?" says Mrs. Wheeler, squinting over her glasses.

"Henry Berg and that awful Fish boy."

"I think it's our duty," says Mrs. Wheeler, "to tell their parents."

"Absolutely," says Miss Tidy Sweet, kind of snapping out the word. And then they hurried down the street arm in arm, only Mrs. Wheeler couldn't hurry very fast, for being big and heavy she soon got out of wind.

Ducking into the weeds, Friday and I followed Mrs. Camel's rickety wooden fence until we came to the creek. And was it ever full to the brim! Oh, baby! The clay-colored water churned and foamed. Friday pointed to a pile of railroad ties on the opposite bank. But we weren't very anxious to build the raft right away. For the current was awfully dangerous looking. It would be safer, Friday said, to wait

until the water began to go down. Then, if Slats and Tail Light came along, we could build two rafts and have a sea battle.

The bank was pretty slippery. And in reaching for a willow Friday fell in up to his waist. Boy, did he ever look funny as he stood there with his legs spraddled out. All I could think of was a drenched dog.

Then along came Mrs. Camel.

"Sure," says she, looking kind of troubled, "have ye b'ys seen anything of me geese?"

While I like Mrs. Camel, as I say, and often crank her washing machine for her, I've got to confess that I hate her geese.

We looked up and down the creek, but saw nothing of the missing geese. And kind of worked up over her loss, the old lady began to jaw at us.

"Git," says she, shaking her cane at us.

"What do you mean?" says Friday.

"I ain't a-goin' to have ye hangin' around here."

That made us kind of hot.

"I never heard," says Friday, "that you own the whole creek."

"Sure," says she, "your poor mithers have enough to worry 'em without havin' the likes of ye two young scallawags brought home

corpses. Be good b'ys, now, an' run along home."

But we refused to budge. So finally she hobbled away, in search of her missing geese. And just about the time she disappeared from our sight I, too, skidded into the creek up to my waist. And there we were!

Wet pants are anything but comfortable, let me tell you. So I was glad when Friday suggested that we hide in the weeds behind the town hall and hang our pants in the sun to dry.

While we were parked in the weeds who should come along but Tom Conover. He had a fishing pole over his shoulder and a bait can in his hand. Tom is big enough to have a girl. And when there is an ice-cream social, or a church supper, he always buys a ticket for Maude Godwin. He is good to kids our size. So we like him a lot.

Friday stood up in the weeds as high as he dared and waved his arms.

"Hey, Tom," he yelled, "come here."

And Tom crossed over to where we were.

"What kind of a game is it?" says he.

"It isn't a game," says Friday.

"Then what's the idea of hiding in the weeds?" says Tom.

"Our pants are out there in the sun," says Friday.

"So I notice," says Tom. "What are you doing?—airing them?"

Friday gave a quick account of our dip in the creek.

"Where are you headed for?" he wound up.

"The second quarry," says Tom. Then he grinned. "I was thinking of asking you kids to go fishing with me," says he. "But, of course, you can't go through town without pants."

"Blame the luck," says Friday. Then he kind of brightened. "I've got an idea," says he, looking at me.

"Shoot," says I.

"You know when we were jumping around in the mud puddle and Miss Tidy Sweet and Mrs. Wheeler jawed at us for not having pants on when we did. Well, why can't we just roll up our underwear, under our coats, and pretend that we have pants on when we haven't?"

Gee-miny crickets!

"If you can think of anything riskier," says I, "I wish you'd spit it out."

"Let's," he urged.

"But we've got to pass right through town," I held off.

"Aw, be a sport, Trigger," he coaxed.

"Instead of a sport," says I, giving in, "I have the feeling that I'm going to be a family disgrace."

Rolling up our underwear we buttoned our coats around us and hopped out of the weeds, Tom having offered to carry our pants for us. And did I ever feel shaky as we started down the street! Gee! It was fun to fool Miss Tidy Sweet and make her think we hadn't any pants on when we did. But I thought how awful it would be if anybody stopped us, thinking we had pants on when we didn't.

Then who should we see coming toward us but Tom's girl. Just imagine how we felt trailing after him in our underwear!

"Holy cow!" squeaked Friday, and we beat it around a corner as fast as we could go. For we weren't going to be caught by a girl in a fix like that. I guess not!

Tom was chuckling when we caught up with him at the canal bridge. Then we headed for the second quarry, which is about a mile south of town. When it rains the water in the quarry doesn't get muddy like the creek, because the quarry is fed by springs.

Baiting his hook, Tom soon landed a nice perch. Then he caught a bullhead. We were

so busy watching him string his fish that we never noticed when noon came. Finally, though, I began to get hungry and suggested to Friday that it was time to go home and get something to eat.

Tom looked at his watch.

"Yes," says he, "you kids had better beat it. For it's going on to three o'clock."

We were scared stiff. For we knew that we'd catch it for not coming home to dinner. We felt pretty blue as we looked around for our pants. And when we couldn't find them we felt sick all over.

"*Good*-night!" says Friday. "Where's my pants?"

"And where's *my* pants?" says I.

Tom ran his fingers through his hair.

"I must have dropped them uptown," says he.

After our exciting day I'm all done up. So I guess I'll stop here and go to bed. To-morrow night I'll write down how we got home and what happened to us. I guess it will surprise you.

CHAPTER VIII

AN EXCITING ADVENTURE

July 4—This has been a noisy day. We had fun with firecrackers. Friday sat down on one of my big firecrackers when it was ready to go off. You should have seen him jump. He burned a big hole in the seat of his pants. His ma jawed like sixty, telling me, of course, that it was my fault. I wonder if she'll ever wake up to the fact that Friday isn't the perfect little angel that she thinks he is.

My ma told me when she wrapped a rag around my thumb, which has a bad burn on it, that she hated to see the Fourth of July come. But I like it. I think it's the bulliest day of the whole year.

Slats is mad at Friday. Friday spent a quarter for a big Roman candle and when he was lighting it one of the balls shot out and socked Slats in the stomach. He let out an awful yip.

As for Tail Light, can you imagine what that little runt did! He spent all of his money for peanuts. Bought a whole dollar's worth, mind

you. Every time I met him to-day he was eating peanuts. I bet they have to use a stomach pump on him, all right.

And now I'll finish writing down what happened to me and Friday yesterday afternoon. You will remember that we went fishing with Tom Conover. When we got ready to go home to dinner we learned that Tom had lost our pants.

"Nothin' doin'," says I, when Friday suggested that we button our coats around us and skin out for home. "I had enough of that truck this morning."

"But what shall we do?" says he.

"To play safe," says I, "the only thing we can do is to wait here till it gets dark. Then we can sneak home without being seen."

But it was lonesome at the quarry when Tom left. So we ducked into a cornfield and circled toward the railroad track. Crossing the track we took to the woods and in time found ourselves on the top of Clarks Hill, which is the big hill overlooking the north side of town.

Lying side by side on our stomachs, with the town spread out below us, Friday suddenly grabbed my hand.

"Look!" says he, pointing to where a num-

ber of people were running up and down the creek bank.

We could see Mrs. Camel leaning on her cane. And occasionally she raised the stick to point into the creek, which was still full to the brim. The people at times gathered around her to hear what she was saying. I could see Friday's ma and pa and my ma and pa and a lot of the near neighbors. Slats was there, too. He had his coaster. The people seemed to be much worked up. We couldn't for the life of us figure out what had happened unless they were trying to rescue Mrs. Camel's geese. Nearly everybody had a rake or a pole or something. Still, there was no sign of the geese.

Late that afternoon the people went home, trailing along sort of dejected-like. And when it got dark Friday and I scrambled down the steep hill and came into town. We kept close to the fences. When we heard people coming we ducked into the weeds.

Crossing our back yard we crept through the kitchen door. The door leading into the living room was closed. Voices came to us from the other side. Friday's ma and pa were there and I could hear my ma. She was crying.

Putting my eye to the keyhole I discovered that the door wasn't quite latched. And when it swung open an inch or two I could see my

ma sitting in a rocking-chair. Her face was buried in her hands and my pa was talking to her and tenderly patting her on the back.

"He was a good boy," says my ma. "We didn't half appreciate him. And now we've lost him. Boo! hoo! hoo! hoo!"

Friday's ma is kind of fat. And, now, as she spoke, her broad shoulders heaved up and down.

"My Ronald was a good boy, too," says she. "On his last report card he got three 'E's'."

"And Henry was so good about cleaning his teeth," says my ma. "I hardly ever had to scold him. He—he bought me a Christmas present, too, out of money that he earned himself. And now the little statue that I've hardly looked at since he gave it to me will be the most precious thing I own."

"My Ronald gave me a box of candy," says Friday's ma, "and ate it up."

Mrs. Camel was there, too.

"Indeed," says she, "I tried me best to drive 'em away from the creek. But would the little scallawags listen to me? Faith, they would not. An' as soon as I heard ye callin' 'em to dinner I says to meself, says I: 'There! —they've gone an' fell in the creek an' got drowned.' "

I looked at Friday and he looked at me.

His eyes were as big as saucers. So were mine, I guess.

"Gosh all hemlocks!" says he. "They think we're drowned. And it was us that they were looking for this afternoon when we saw them running up and down the creek bank."

" 'Tis the will of the Lord," piped up Mrs. Camel. "An' while ye'll miss 'em, as ye say, 'tis better to have 'em pass out this way than to be hung."

Then she glanced toward the kitchen door. And when she saw us peeking through the crack she gave a screech that almost raised the roof. She thought, I guess, that we were ghosts.

But my ma didn't think so. When she saw us she gave a wild cry. And then she and Friday's ma came running across the room to where we were. Mr. Fish came running, too, and so did my pa. Grabbing us, they threw their arms around us and kissed us something fierce. I never got such a hugging and kissing in all my life. It was an awful shock to me. Like Friday, I had expected to get switched. And instead I was getting kissed. It made me dizzy.

It was then that Mrs. Camel let out another screech.

"Mither of Moses!" she cried. "The little scallawags hain't got no pants on."

My ma held me out at arm's length and looked me over.

"For goodness sake," says she, "where's your pants?"

"They're lost," I told her miserably.

"And where's your pants?" says Friday's ma, looking him over.

It was an awful embarrassing moment for both of us. I tell you I was glad I had my underwear on.

Friday told his ma that his pants were lost, too. And we figured that now we'd get switched barelegged right there in front of Mrs. Camel. But we didn't. It makes me happy to think about it.

"What is the loss of a pair of pants," says my ma, "when we have our dear boys back in our arms, safe and sound?"

"Yes, indeed," says Friday's ma. And then we both got another dose of kissing.

That put us in high feather. And we told how we fell in the creek and how Tom Conover lost our pants.

"And you've had no dinner?" says my ma.

"No," says Friday, speaking for both of us.

"Nor supper?"

"No," says Friday again.

"Goodness gracious!" says my ma. "You poor boys must be pretty nearly famished."

Then she gave Friday a pair of my pants with patches on the seat and I hunted up a pair of overalls. I never realized till then what a lot of confidence a pair of pants gives a fellow. We strutted around in front of Mrs. Camel, whose geese, we learned, had come home at sundown. My ma and Friday's ma got up a swell supper for us—fried potatoes and cold roast pork and two kinds of pickles and jelly and cake.

Well, I guess that tells everything. But I have made this resolution and I'm going to keep it: Hereafter, wet or dry, I'm going to keep my pants on me where they belong.

Friday says he is, too.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN WESTY WENT TO WAR

July 5—They had an awful time over to Tail Light's house last night. Doc Fosse was called there in the middle of the night. Out of the twenty bags of peanuts that Tail Light bought only two bags were found unopened, so his folks figure that he must have eaten the other eighteen bags. But why any kid should spend his money for peanuts when he can buy firecrackers is a riddle to me. Tail Light, though, always was kind of goofy. Do you know what he did the other day? His ma sent him down town to the barber shop to get his hair cut and he told the barber that he wanted his hair cut with a hole in the top, like pa's.

July 6—I heard to-day that Tail Light is out of danger. And it was only one bag of peanuts that they found. Gosh!

July 7—My thumb was so sore to-day that my ma let me stay home from Sunday School. When Sunday School was over my thumb got better. Friday and Slats came over after dinner and we played "Duck on the rock." Only two of us got hit on the shins.

July 8—Westy Briggs was here to-day. He's the red-headed kid who used to live in the old Warner house near Washington Park. I sure was sorry when he and his grandparents moved to Garnet Corners, which is a little town on the extreme eastern edge of our county. Westy came over on the bus. I wanted him to stay all night with me. But his grandparents weren't very well, he said. And he was afraid that if he didn't come home on the last bus, as he had promised to do, they would worry about him.

He sure is a good kid. And did he and I ever have fun the time he went to war! Gee! I guess I'll write it down. For it's as good as a story.

As I say, Westy, at that time, lived with his grandparents in an old-fashioned house on the east side of town. Our house was much the newest. But, in a way, I liked Westy's home the best. It had high, steep-pitched roofs, with

wooden crochet work under the eaves, which, to my notion, matched the old-fashioned crocheted things that his grandma wore around her neck, usually over a black silk dress.

And there was the big kitchen! Oh, boy, the fun we had there on winter nights, popping corn over the red-topped wood stove, with the snowy wind howling at us through the frosted windows. But best of all, in season, was the big back yard, a dandy place for tennis and croquet.

"Say, Trigger," says Westy to me one afternoon in May, as we lay on the lawn, "did you know that the war's still going on?"

I wondered at the sort of deep look in his eyes. Still, knowing him so well, I shouldn't have wondered, either. For that's the kind of a kid he is. I'm sort of cuckoo, myself. (I guess you know that, all right!) But he is more earnest and reflective. It's his nature.

"Which war?" says I.

"The Civil War," says he.

Now, thinks I to myself, what was his idea in talking that way? The Civil War, as everybody knows, ended years ago. I looked at him curiously. Old sober-sides! That's what *he* was, all right. Yet, more than being sober, something seemed to weigh heavy on his mind.

And as I lay there in the grass, sort of studying him, wondering if I couldn't do something to help him, it came to me all of a sudden how much I cared for him. Good old Westy! He sure was the cat's knuckles, all right.

An orphan, he was being raised by his Grandpa and Grandma Briggs. Sometimes I slept with him nights, as he had a big wide bed. And then Grandma Briggs would tell us stories about the South as it was when she was a girl, before the war, with wide-spreading, sun-baked plantations, swarming with busy slaves, and stately mansions, the doors of which, in true southern hospitality, were open at all times to relatives and friends. Grandma Briggs' stories were swell until she came to the part about Abraham Lincoln's election. And then her face, usually so kind and sunny-like, got hard, like an icicle. For she never had forgotten that she was a "Souther," even though, after the war, she married a "Norther."

Grandpa Briggs, with his prominent G.A.R. pin, was always talking about the "Northers" and the "Southers." And, of course, according to the way *he* told it, old Union soldier that he was, the "Southers" were all wrong in their hot-headed ideas, and, being stubborn and un-

willing to listen to reason, simply had to be whipped and thus brought to time.

Which may be true. But I thought it would be just as well if he did less bragging about it.

"According to United States history," Westy went on, "the Civil War ended years ago with the fall of Richmond. But the histories are wrong. That war isn't over. It's still going on, with Grandpa attacking and routing and Grandma defending and retreating. They've even split up."

"Meaning which?" says I, interested.

"Grandpa and the Federal forces are bivouacked in the east wing—see him over there, nodding in his chair—and the Confederates, under Grandma's stiff-backed command, are entrenched in the west wing. They don't even speak to each other."

"And when did all this happen?" says I.

"The day before yesterday."

I grinned.

"But if they live in separate wings, where do *you* live?"

"Oh," says he, "I sleep with the 'Northers' and eat with the 'Southers.' But please don't laugh, Trigger. Much less than being funny, it's all wrong, to my notion. There shouldn't be any such ill feeling between the North and

the South, much less between a husband and wife as old and loving as my grandparents. It's really silly of them to act this way."

"Your Grandpa does a lot of blowing," says I, thoughtful-like.

"That's just the trouble," waggled Westy. "And I don't blame Grandma for getting up on her ear. Just because his side licked, and his brothers made a business of sneaking slaves into Canada, is no reason why she should be required to listen to the endless story day after day. It's unkind. I don't mean, though, that he does it to be mean. For he isn't that kind of a man at all. But because it's national history, and he had a part in it, he thinks it's perfectly all right for him to keep talking about it. And it is—away from home. But when he's home he ought to keep his mouth shut. And Grandma, on her part, ought to be less touchy. She says now that she won't march with the G.A.R. ladies on Memorial Day. And Grandpa who, as you know, is never so happy as when he's marching behind a fife and drum corps, is mad enough to bite nails.

"Which puts me in hot water," Westy went on. "For now if I march with the other Boy Scouts, as the scoutmaster wants us to do, and which we should do, Grandma is going to

feel hurt, letting herself believe that I'm taking sides against her. And if I drop out, to please her, Grandpa probably will blow up—you know how he is—and shoot me at sunrise, along with the rest of the traitorous rebels."

"You ought to be twins," I grinned. "Then you could please both sides."

He looked at me.

"Twins?" he repeated, sort of weighing the suggestion in his mind. "By George!" he cried, with dancing eyes, as the wheels in his head began to spin around. "I wonder if we can't."

"*We?*" says I.

"Sure thing," says he, grinning. "You can be one twin and I'll be the other. We'll take sides—see? A 'Norther' and a 'Souther.' Just like them. And the sillier we make it the better."

His mind worked too quick for me.

"I don't get your idea at all," says I.

"You will," he further grinned, "when the proper time comes."

We got up then and meandered around the house to the back yard, where the commander-in-chief of the Confederate forces was sitting in a shaded chair knitting. She hardly took time to look up at us. I like old ladies. And

of all the old ladies in our town I liked Grandma Briggs the best. For her pies were wonderful.

But before I had a chance to hint to her how hungry I was, or inquire, in fun, how many of the Confederate soldiers were standing around in the snow, waiting on her for socks, I was called home, where I learned that my pa was packing up to go to Boston, having been called there on important business.

"He wants me to go with him," my ma kind of felt around, to see if I'd set up a howl. "But, of course, I wouldn't feel right leaving you home all alone."

"Don't you worry about him, Mrs. Berg," says Westy, who had followed me home. "For my grandparents are crazy over him. They'll be tickled pink to have him stay at our house."

Which explains briefly how I come to be a "Souther."

And the next night after school we had our first battle—for it was Westy's scheme, I might explain, to end the "war" between the grandparents by going to war himself.

"Remember," says he, "to all appearances we hate each other like cats and dogs. I'm a 'Norther,' on Grandpa's side. And you're a 'Souther.' When I sock you, I'm going to sock

hard. And I expect the same kind of punishment from you."

So we put a white "lime" line down the middle of the back yard, which was a battle-field now and not a peaceful croquet court. Then, building forts out of piled-up boxes, each fort having its proper flag, we began socking each other with old potatoes, of which we had a bushel apiece. When our baskets were empty we'd call a truce, or whatever you call it, during which the "ammunition" was gathered up and equally divided, after which the white flags were lowered, thus calling off the truce, and the bombardment went on.

We rigged up a pair of imitation cannons, too—but before we did any cannonading we properly sent polite messages back and forth, warning the other side to get its women and children safely out of range.

CHAPTER X

PEACE!

JULY 8 (*Continued*)—Well, the first afternoon Grandpa and Grandma Briggs didn't pay much attention to us, being too busy, I guess, watching each other out of the corner of their eyes, and probably wondering, hopefully, if one or the other wasn't about ready to give in. So, to get attention, we fought harder than ever. And it helped a lot when a storekeeper gave us some shipped-in tomatoes that had spoiled on his hands.

Grandma Briggs came into the garden to pull some radishes for supper.

"Laws-a-me!" says she, raising her glasses in astonishment as the tomatoes whizzed through the air. "Aren't you boys afraid you'll hurt each other?"

"Hurt *him?*" I bellowed. "I'd like to ram a cannon ball clean through him."

"Tut, tut," says she. "That's no way for a boy to speak of his chum."

"He's a 'Norther,'" says I, sort of spitting

it out. "And I'm going to lick him if it's the last thing I do."

Grandma Briggs looked across at the Federal flag, then back at me.

"And what are you?" says she curiously.

"A 'Souther,' of course," says I proudly. "I'm on your side."

"And is Westy on his Grandpa's side?" her curious look continued.

"You bet your sweet life," the Federal army stuck its mug over the top of the opposite fort. And then did I ever sock him! Oh, baby!

"Stop it!" screeched Grandma Briggs.

Up went the Federal flag of truce.

"What's the matter now?" I bellowed.

"I've got tomato seeds in my eyes."

Getting him fixed up, we pulled down the white flags and resumed the battle.

"Get down there, you Carolina carp," bellowed the Federal army, letting fly.

"Get down yourself, you Pennsylvania poodle," I bellowed in turn. Then over I went, on my back, shot plump in the bread basket with a squashy potato.

"I guess you better put me in the hospital," I told the Federal commander, when he came gallantly on the run.

"Then you admit," says he, "that you're licked?"

"Licked?" says I. "Not so you can notice it. But an army can't fight with the stomach-ache."

"Goodness gracious!" says Grandma Briggs, looking puzzled. "I never heard such foolishness in all my life."

"What is there foolish about it?" says Westy. "It's just the way the North and South did."

I got up then.

"Well, Colonel," says the opposing commander, sort of pompous-like, "how are you feeling now?"

"Better," says I, rubbing my stomach.

"Just a minute," says General Grant, with fine courtesy, "there's dust on your epaulets," and he gave my shoulders a careful dusting with his wooden sword.

"Thanks," says I. "Have some chewing gum."

"Well, is it time for another battle?"

"What time is it?" says I.

"A quarter of five."

"All right," says I. "Let's go."

Then Grandpa Briggs hove into sight.

"Um . . ." says he, looking first at one flag

and then at the other. "What 'pears to be goin' on back here?"

"We're having a battle," says General Grant. Then he gave a yell. "Look out! Don't get on the other side of that white line or you'll be a prisoner of war. For that's Confederate territory."

"Hey, General," I boomed across the battlefield.

"I hear you, Colonel."

"How's your ammunition holding out?"

"Fine."

"Mine's all gone."

Up went the other white flag.

"Come on over," says General Grant, "and help yourself."

Grandpa Briggs thought that was too silly for words, though, of course, it was perfectly all right when *he* did much the same thing. We had a good laugh when he went off to the house, muttering to himself and thumping his cane.

"I don't like this new game of yours," says Grandma Briggs that evening when she and I were sitting at mess in the Confederate camp. "I'm afraid one of you will get hurt."

"What matters the loss of a few arms or legs?" says I heroically. "War is war."

"Nonsense," says she. "I want you to be

more careful. Do you hear what I say? For imagine how I'd feel to have your parents come home and find you in the hospital."

"That would be an honor," says I.

"Who's doing the cooking for Westy and his Grandpa?" she then inquired.

"Why worry about them?" says I. "They're 'Northers.' Let them starve. And the sooner the better."

"I asked you a question," says she stiffly.

"Well," says I, hiding a grin, "according to the last reports from the front they're both living on cornflakes and canned soup."

A wistful look came into her eyes.

"I wish—" she began.

"What?" says I quickly.

"Oh, never mind. But you better take this dish of baked potatoes and set it inside their door."

"Yah," says I, "and if they see me I'll get shot."

"Do as I tell you," says she sharply, "and quit talking silly." Then she further inquired: "Does Westy's Grandpa know that there's a war going on in the back yard?"

"Sure thing," says I.

"What did he say?" came quickly.

"He said we were silly."

"My word!" says she, with a queer look. "Did *he* say that?"

Well, this was our regular scout meeting night. But I didn't go. I was a "Souther," I said. And the old parade could go hang for all of me.

But it didn't seem to please Grandma Briggs at all to have me talk that way. In fact, she looked kind of foolish.

"It's a wonder to me," says she, "that you and Westy can sleep in the same bed."

"We don't," says I. "First he kicks me out and then I kick him out."

"Yes," says she, "the bed shows it in the morning. When are you boys going to quit this foolishness?"

"When the war's over," says I.

"The North and the South," says she stiffly, thinking of the defeat of her people, "settled their differences many years ago."

I shook my head.

"The war will never be over," says I, "as long as one side holds a grudge and the other side crows."

The next afternoon the scoutmaster dropped in to see me during the heat of battle.

"I've been told," says he, "that you aren't

going to march in the Memorial Day parade with the other cubs."

"No, sir," I shook my head.

"Why not?" says he.

"It's against my principles," says I. "I'm a 'Souther.'"

I could see by his eyes that Westy had been telling him things.

"What do you mean by that?" he smiled, thinking, no doubt, that I was a good actor.

"Well, Westy's a 'Norther,' on his Grandpa's side, and I'm a 'Souther,' on his Grandma's side."

"Fiddlesticks!" spoke up the old lady, who had followed the scoutmaster into the yard, where we had hoisted the truce flag to talk with him. "You needn't stay out of the parade on my account."

"'Southers' stick together," says I stubbornly.

"I hope you'll persuade him to change his mind," the scoutmaster spoke to Grandma Briggs. "For we need him in the parade, even if he is too young to be a regular scout."

"He'll go if I say so," says Grandma Briggs sternly. "For his ma said that I was to make him mind. And, if necessary, I'll use a switch on him."

"But if it's against my principles," I yipped, "you shouldn't make me do it. For that's as bad as the 'Northers' making the 'Southers' give up their slaves."

"What nonsense!" says Grandma Briggs, with a red face.

"It isn't nonsense," I stood my ground. "It's principle."

"Well," smiled the scoutmaster, "I'll let you settle it between yourselves. And maybe," he dropped the hint, "we'll see both of you in the parade. The time is too long past," he spoke earnestly, "for anyone to make an issue of the Civil War. Each side had its own ideals and made its own mistakes. And many thousands of noble lives, chief among them Abraham Lincoln himself, were sacrificed in the furtherance of these ideals and mistakes. As for letting an old issue like that interfere with our scouting program, the thought is ridiculous. So the thing for you boys to do is to end this battle right now."

"Yes, indeed," says Grandma Briggs firmly.

Well, I didn't want to be stubborn! Anyway, I fancied that there was a new expression on Grandpa Briggs' face as he stood on his side of the white line.

"Hey, General Grant," I bellowed across the battle-field. "Did you hear that?"

"Sure thing," he bellowed back. "What about it?"

"Are you ready to quit?"

"Yes, if you'll give up your sword."

"How about yourself?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've got to give up your sword, too. That's the only way to end the war. And then, if necessary, we'll later pick up our swords in one common cause."

"Anything else?" says General Grant.

"Let's meet on the line," says I, "and talk it over."

Which we did, everybody shaking hands, even Grandpa and Grandma Briggs, who were even gladder than we were, I guess, that the war was over. For Grandpa Briggs looked kind of hungry!

Then we fixed up a paper which read: "Those believing that the war is over sign here. . . . And those believing that the war *isn't* over sign here."

Grandpa Briggs was the last to take the scoutmaster's pen.

"Um . . ." says he, scowling at the paper.

Then, sort of bristling like, he signed his name under the others.

And so once again the bloody battle-field became a peaceful croquet court. Nor is it necessary to add that we all marched in the parade, as good citizens should. That evening Westy and I lay on his lawn in the moonlight. We could hear voices on the front porch.

"It was a wonderful parade," says Grandma Briggs. "Somehow the music thrilled me. I —I feel different. And how beautiful the flowers were. . . . Mr. Wilkinson picked me up in his car."

"Yes," says Grandpa Briggs, "I saw you riding with him. It was his pa, you know, who was on picket duty the night we——"

Westy gripped my arm. But he needn't have worried. For Grandpa Briggs had learned his lesson.

"Do you know what the moon reminds me of?" says the old warrior, in a softer voice.

"What?" Grandma Briggs sort of breathed against his coat.

"The night I kissed you for the first time."

And then we heard a smack.

"Well," says Westy happily, "the war's over at last. . . . Let's go downtown and buy some ice cream."

Which is the end of *that*. Boy, I ought to get a medal for writing down all that junk.

Westy wants me to come over and visit him. And maybe I will later on in the summer. If I do pay him a visit I bet we have fun.

CHAPTER XI

PHANTOM SMOKE

JULY 9—Whoopee! Friday and I are going visiting. We're going to be detectives, too, like Jerry Todd and his gang, and solve a mystery.

I was sitting on the alley fence this morning, exercising my jackknife on a new slingshot crotch, when Friday dragged his manly carcass into sight.

"Get any fish?" says I, cocking one eye down the left-hand leg of the crotch.

"Meaning which?" says he, jumping up beside me.

"I heard that you and your pa were over to Echo Lake yesterday afternoon," says I, sleuthing the crotch's other leg for possible humps.

"We drove over to see my Aunt Maggie," says he.

"I suppose," says I, kind of pointed-like, giving him my full attention, "that it would have seriously damaged the springs of your pa's second-hand Ford if you had taken me along."

"If anybody happens to ask you," says he, "I stopped to get you. But you weren't at home."

"What's that bump on your head?" I then inquired curiously.

"A mosquito bite."

"Oh! . . ." says I brightly. "Then you really got a bite, huh?"

"Even better than that," says he, "my pa hooked two big black bass."

"And what did *you* hook?" says I cheerfully. "The seat of your pants?"

"Speaking of pants," says he, "you should have seen the way I filled out mine when I staggered away from the supper table. I never was so full of fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy and pear preserves in all my life. And the *cream cake!* Man, oh, man! You sure missed it, Trigger."

"Anyway," says I, kind of cold-like, "it's sweet of you to tell me about it—especially the fried chicken."

"Just to show you how unselfish I am," says he, "I watched my chance and snitched a big drumstick for you."

"Oh, Friday!" I threw open my arms. "You're a friend worth having. . . . Where is it?"

"I got hungry in the middle of the night and ate it."

The big nut!

"And now, Trigger," he laughed, "I have a wonderful surprise for you."

"After that drumstick mess," says I weakly, "I'm prepared for anything. So spit it out."

"My cousin Ted wants you and I to come over there and help him solve a mystery."

"If only I could believe you," says I, kind of wistful-like, as a picture of fried chicken and cream cake sort of danced before my eyes.

"Do you want to go?" says he.

"Tell me first about the mystery," says I.

"It's a phantom."

"A which?" says I, letting out my neck.

"A phantom," says he.

"I'm getting no place fast," says I.

"A phantom," says he, "is a kind of ghost. But it isn't always a ghost. Sometimes it's a ship or a house. In this particular case it's smoke."

"Don't keep me in suspense," says I, figuring that if I had six encyclopedias and seven dictionaries I probably could keep up with him.

"Well," says he, "here's the whole story: As you know, my Aunt Maggie owns a small truck farm on the shore of Echo Lake. Never

having had any children of her own, or a husband either, she got tired of living alone. And when a near neighbor died, leaving three children, she took the whole caboodle of them to raise. Since then she lost a lot of jack in a western land swindle; so I guess she'd be better off alone. Still, Dave, who is the oldest of the three kids, is a big help to her. And she's crazy over Ted."

"Then he isn't your real cousin?" says I, kind of disappointed-like.

"No. But I call him my cousin."

Fishing in his shirt pocket Friday then brought out a wrinkled kodak picture.

"That little squirt in the front of the boat," he pointed out, "is Betty Jane. The big guy handling the oars is Dave. And the freckled masterpiece in the back seat is Ted, himself."

"Where was this picture taken?" says I. "On Echo Lake?"

"Sure thing. That wooded hill that you see in the background is the island where Ted saw the phantom smoke—only, as you'll find out when you get over there, it isn't a real island. People just call it that."

"The boat looks brand new," says I, wishing I owned it. For it was a keen job, all right. And I'm crazy over boats.

"It is new," says Friday. "In fact, Dave just put it into the Lake last week."

"Did he make it?"

"He and Ted together."

"How old are they?" I inquired curiously.

"Ted is just our age and Dave is sixteen."

"Is that the boat your pa used?" I further inquired.

"No. Dave has three other boats, just like this one, that he rents to fishermen. Ted, though, used this boat when he took me out on the lake to show me the phantom smoke."

"Then you saw it yourself?" says I, with growing interest.

"I most certainly did. And I could have sworn, Trigger, that there were campers on the island. For it looked exactly like white wood smoke. But when we landed there, after a short row, not a soul was in sight. Nor was there the least sign of a camp fire."

"I've heard all kinds of queer ghost stories," says I. "But this is the first time I ever heard of a spook building a fire."

"A lot of the lake people," says Friday, referring to the summer resorters, "think that the island is haunted. For earlier a queer old geezer named Penny Hibbard lost his life there in a tamarack swamp."

"But why should his spook start building fires?" says I.

"That's the riddle," says Friday. "And it is to get at the truth of the matter, if we can, that Ted wants us to come over."

"You're sure," I grinned, "that your aunt won't kick us out?"

"Aunt Maggie's home," says he, "is open at all times to any chum of mine."

So, having gotten my ma's consent, it's all arranged now that Friday and I are to spend a week at Echo Lake farm. Boy, I can hardly wait till morning. I bet we have fun solving that mystery. For, as Friday says, ghost or no ghost, things like that aren't done without a reason. I bet you that I hook some swell black bass, too.

July 10—Well, here we are! And is this ever a darby place! I always did like the country. One time I went to Chicago with my pa. His big toes were crooked and he went to the city to have them straightened by a specialist. Chicago is interesting. But you can bet your Sunday shoes that I didn't care to locate there. I guess not! Me for the little old country town every time. Why, if a Chicago kid went bare-

footed, like we do in Crocketville, and like Ted Dixon does here, the city people would stare their eyes out. And in that great big place, with its thousands and thousands of kids, I bet you they haven't one real swimming hole. Oh, they have concrete pools, and junk like that. And they have Lake Michigan. But I'm talking now about an old-fashioned swimming hole, like the one that Mark Twain flopped around in when he was a boy in Missouri, with snakes swimming in it and hungry bloodsuckers parked under the rocks. Back home (I mean in Crocketville) we peg rocks at the snakes to drive them away. Then we have the hole all to ourselves. Our springboard is the limb of an overhanging tree. And when the water gets low we put another layer of rocks and mud on the dam. *That* kind of swimming is fun.

I was up this morning at five bells. First I packed my clothes, putting in plenty of everyday shirts and khaki pants. Then I hunted up a lot of other junk. I even brought my kite string along. I have my diary, too, as you can see.

My pa growled because I made such a racket. For he likes to sleep in the morning. But he got up and dressed when I accidentally tipped the bureau over. We had breakfast at six o'clock, with my ma yawning behind the coffee-

pot and my pa sort of nodding in his chair. Then, shortly after six, having said good-by to Slats and Tail Light, who got up to see us off, we draped ourselves in the back seat of Friday's pa's fifty-eight-cent flivver and headed west. It wasn't much of a drive—only eighteen miles. Friday and I sang songs on the way. First we sang *The Old Oaken Bucket.* Then we sang *Old McDonald Has a Farm.* Friday's pa, who evidently doesn't care very much for good singing, asked us then to sing *Good-by Forever,* and shut up. But as we didn't know *Good-by Forever* we shut up anyway. It was the sensible thing to do, Friday said, who later successfully touched his pa for two bucks for spending money. You can see, all right, why he was so willing to quit singing.

Pretty soon we came within sight of the lake. And did it ever look peachy in the morning sunlight! I counted fifteen fishing boats. We passed private lanes leading to the summer homes on the lake shore. And then, after circling the lake, which is about a mile wide and half again as long, we came to the farmhouse lane.

A long-legged kid came running to meet us. It was Ted, Friday said. Then we caught sight of Aunt Maggie. Boy, she's hot! I like her

almost as well as I do my own ma. And can she *cook!* Some people are always growling at boys, telling them they eat too much, and truck like that. But Aunt Maggie worries all the time for fear we won't get enough to eat. Friday and I counted cookies on each other this afternoon. He ate twenty-seven against my thirty-one. But at that he came out ahead, for he had three pieces of pie. The big pig! I guess he needn't get the notion in his head that he's the only one around here who likes pie.

I met Dave at the dinner table. But he's too quiet to suit me. Gosh! You'd never suspect that he and Ted were brothers. For Ted is the snappiest kid I ever met in all my life. Take it from me there's nothing quiet about *him.* Even the chickens scatter when they see him coming. I was in hopes that he'd have a pony. For I love to ride horseback. But all I've seen in the barn so far is a cow and three yellow cats. The farmhouse is built on a knoll, overlooking the lake. A big strawberry patch stretches up and down the edge of the boggy lake shore. Dave was setting out more strawberry plants to-day. And I overheard him telling Aunt Maggie (which is what I call her, too) that maybe next year they'd make enough extra money from their strawberries to buy a horse.

If he had a horse, he said, he could haul sand and fill in the boggy shore land. There was a big demand for lake-shore lots, he said. I heard, too, that a real estate man living near here in the little town of Canbridge, where Ted goes to school, has built a road to the island, where he expects to sell a great many lots. I wish I had the jack to buy Dave a horse. I'd like to see him sell his filled-in lots first.

Oh, yes, I almost overlooked Betty Jane. She and Ted don't hitch for two cents. For she's always tattling on him. I can't say that I'm crazy over her. Still, she's all right for a girl.

Friday and I wore our good suits in the car, our ma's having made us promise that we'd dress up on Sunday and go to church in Canbridge. So, having arrived at the farmhouse, about the first thing we did was to jump out of our good clothes and grab a khaki outfit.

Then we set out to explore the farm and surrounding country, ending up at the farmhouse pier where Dave keeps his rental boats. The new boat was there. And eager to see the phantom smoke that I had heard so much about I suggested that we take a row. But, to my disappointment, there was no sign of the smoke to-day. Which proves, all right, that there's something spooky about it.

FRIDAY AND I SANG SONGS ON THE WAY.

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree. *Page* 93

We hadn't time to visit the island this morning, Aunt Maggie having told us to be home at twelve o'clock sharp. But when dinner was over we set out for the island, Ted explaining to us on the way that it wasn't a real island, but a sort of peninsula, joined to the mainland by a treacherous tamarack swamp. It was there, we were told, that old Penny Hibbard, the owner of the land, had lost his life.

Later I had a chance to see for myself what the swamp was like. Boy, deliver me from ever getting caught in a place like that! A regular jungle. Once, when we were jumping from bog to bog, Ted skidded, sinking in the black muck up to his waist. But that was nothing, he said, crawling out. Deeper in the swamp the holes had no bottom at all.

We saw spotted snakes, too, and all kinds of poisonous vines. Ted pointed these out to us so that we could dodge them. And *mosquitoes!* Sweet doctor! They tried to eat us alive. I was glad when the leader turned back.

"And you say those are tamaracks?" says I, pointing to the tall, sentinel-like trees in the swamp.

"Sure thing," says Ted. "And the big trees that you see over there on the island are basswoods."

"Judging from their size," says I, rubbering at the basswoods, "they must be thousands of years old."

"Oh, not *thousands* of years," says Ted. "Still, I've heard that they are the biggest trees in the county."

"Do they ever get hollow?" Friday inquired.

"I suppose so," says Ted. "A great many trees die that way. But what's your idea in asking that?"

"I was wondering," says Friday," if we couldn't build a tree house, with a ladder inside the trunk, like the boys did in the *Swiss Family Robinson* book."

It was supper time when we got home. Later we walked to town, a mile away, where we bought a supply of licorice. And now Friday is blatting at me to blow out the kerosene lamp and jump into bed. He wants me to scratch his back, he says.

Ted is sharing his room with us, an extra bed having been set up in one corner. And if somebody doesn't get laid out to-night in a pillow fight I miss my guess. I'll probably be the first one. For I heard Friday and Ted whispering together.

CHAPTER XII

A CRY IN THE DARK

JULY 11—Everything is quiet to-night along the Potomac. But was it ever noisy around here last night! Oh, baby! Standing the racket as long as she could, Aunt Maggie finally swooped down on us in her ruffled nightgown, threatening to use a switch on us if we didn't quit throwing junk at each other and go to sleep.

Ted's stuffed owl lost one of its legs in the fracas. But I don't know yet whether it was the stuffed owl that laid me out or Friday's shoes. But I should worry. I got as much fun out of the battle as the guys who started it.

We had pancakes for breakfast. Friday, I guess, never saw a pancake before. For he ate and ate, acting as though he was afraid that if he stopped eating the magic secret would be lost to him forever.

"My stars!" says Aunt Maggie at last. "Aren't you ever going to get filled up?"

"I've been full for the past ten minutes," groaned Friday. "But you kept putting them on my plate. So I had to eat them. For my ma says it isn't polite to leave stuff."

"Punch him in the stomach," says Ted, "and hear him pop."

"No!" cried Friday, protecting his stomach. "Don't do it. *Please.*"

Certain to-day that I'd see the phantom smoke I hurried out on the lake as soon as breakfast was over. But the spook, I guess, is taking a vacation. Which, as you can imagine, was a big disappointment to me. If Friday hadn't seen the smoke with his own eyes I'd begin to suspect that Ted was stuffing us. For he's full of tricks. But Friday swears up and down that the smoke is no trick.

I helped Dave set out strawberry plants this afternoon. And later he and I went fishing. But the fish didn't seem to like our bait. Altogether it was a very quiet and uneventful day.

July 12—Wanting to try my luck this morning with my pa's casting rod I got up at daybreak. And what do you know if I didn't hook a big bass the very first thing!

But even more exciting than that I saw the

phantom smoke, though, like Friday, it was hard for me to believe at first that it wasn't real smoke. Yet, when I approached the island the smoke completely disappeared. I didn't land. For I was all alone. And if you must know the truth I felt kind of shaky. What I had seen was ghost smoke, all right. There was no doubt of that. And, of course, as the old saying is, where there's ghost smoke there's a ghost.

Returning with Ted and Friday, after a hurried breakfast, we again detected the peculiar smoke spiral. But, as before, when we pulled for the island the smoke vanished. Nor could we find the slightest trace of a camp fire. Yet, when we again rowed into the lake, there was the smoke spiral just as plain as day!

While we were talking back and forth about the mystery, wondering if the smoke was a mirage or something, a man came into sight on the sandy beach.

"Who is he?" says Friday, letting out his neck.

"Search me," says Ted.

"Let's row closer," says I.

Which we did. And satisfied that the man wasn't a ghost we finally landed.

"Can you tell me," says he, "where I'll find the owner of these lots?"

"They were laid out by a Canbridge real estate man named Kamp," says Ted. "But I never heard that he had bought them."

"Has he an office in Canbridge?" says the man.

"Yes, sir," says Ted.

"Possibly you know what the lots are priced at?"

"No, sir," says Ted.

"I'm looking for a place to build a summer home. This would be an ideal location if it wasn't for the pesky mosquitoes. Is there a road out of here?"

"I understand," says Ted, "that Mr. Kamp is building a road."

Telling us then that he was stopping at one of the lake-shore hotels, the man got into his boat, on the other side of the island, and rowed away.

"Why didn't you tell him about your own lots?" says Friday eagerly.

"We haven't anything that he'd buy," says Ted.

"But your land would make peachy lots if it were filled in," says Friday.

"Yah," says Ted, "if——"

Here, to our surprise, a lone boy stepped into sight.

"I heard what you guys said," glared the newcomer, whose lanky legs and long neck made him seem twice as tall as us.

"Well," says Ted, showing by his actions that he recognized the kid, "what of it?"

It made the newcomer mad, I guess, because Ted wouldn't cringe to him.

"If you dare to sell that man one of your punk lots," he cried, with flashing eyes, "my father will put you in jail."

"Who is your father?" says Friday. "The President of the United States?"

"You'll find out blamed soon if you go butting in on us."

"Who's trying to butt in on you?" says Ted.

"You are."

"You're a liar."

"Yah," says Friday, "and so's your old man."

"You guys are going to get socked in the jaw if you won't watch your tongue."

"Yes," says Ted, "and while we're getting one sock you'll get a dozen."

"You and your crummy gang!" the kid sneered.

"It wouldn't take much of a gang," says Ted, "to lick *you*."

"You can't do it alone."

"Touch me and see."

"*Touch* you?" the kid blatted. "You'll be lucky if I don't knock your block off."

"Talk's cheap," says Ted.

"You better beat it if you know what's good for you. For this is private property."

"Who says so?"

"Me."

"And who are you?" says Friday.

"Alvin Kamp, Jr."

"I don't believe that you own the island at all," says Ted. "For I never heard that it had changed hands."

"My father's been paying the taxes on it for over twenty years."

"Well, what of that?"

Up went smarty's cute little pug nose.

"*You* better learn something about the law," says he loftily.

"I suppose," says Ted, "that you know it all."

"I know this much: If a man pays the taxes on a piece of land for twenty years it's his. See?"

"I've always understood," says Ted, "that this land belonged to old Mrs. Kelly."

"Poof!" sneered smarty. "She couldn't pay the taxes on a tin canary."

"It's no disgrace to be poor," Ted sort of bridled.

"Possibly not," young money bags gestured lordly-like, thinking, of course, that he was the cream of the earth, or whatever you call it. "But it's an awful handicap."

"Oh, I don't know," says Ted.

"This is a big deal," the kid continued his smart talk. "And my father expects to clean up thousands of dollars."

"How about Mrs. Kelly?"

"We should worry about her."

Ted was good and hot now. For, as he told us later on, Mrs. Kelly was an old friend of his.

"If the law lets your father get by with this," he told the Kamp kid, "I'll be ashamed to admit that I'm an American citizen."

"I suppose you'd like to stop us," sneered the young real estate king.

"I would if I could."

Which made the kid madder than ever.

"Oh," he pushed out his mug, "you would, huh?"

"Yes," Ted did a little mug-pushing on his own account, "I would, *huh.*"

"Git out of here," the kid thundered, "before I throw you out. And don't you dare come back, either."

He followed us to the boat, saying all kinds

of mean things as we left the island. I wanted to go back and sock him. So did Friday. But Ted told us to hold our tempers.

"A fellow doesn't gain anything," says he, "by getting mad."

"Just the same," Friday scowled back at the kid on the shore, "it's fun to sock a bird like that."

"It's generally agreed around here," Ted then told us, "that his father is the crookedest man in the whole county. And I can very well believe it after what I just heard. The idea of him cheating a helpless old lady out of her property! Money, it seems, means everything to some men. For twenty years he's been scheming to steal this land. Now it's his. The money from the lots will go into his pockets. And old Mrs. Kelly, I suppose, will die in the poorhouse."

"It isn't right," says Friday fiercely.

"You're blamed tootin' it isn't right," says Ted, showing how worked up he was. "But what can we do about it? Old Kamp is as rich as Missouri mud. And with the law on his side we stand no chance at all."

There was a lot of talk at the dinner table.

"I'm so sorry for Mrs. Kelly," says Aunt Maggie, "that I could almost cry my eyes out."

"And is it really true, Aunt Maggie," says Ted, "that a man can get property by paying the taxes on it?"

"I suppose so," Aunt Maggie spoke doubtfully. "Certainly, Mr. Kamp, shrewd scoundrel that he is, wouldn't lay claim to the island if he wasn't sure of his rights."

"He'll find plenty of buyers for his lots," says Dave, in that thoughtful way of his.

"Poor Mrs. Kelly!" says Aunt Maggie. "Isn't it a shame that the land, as now subdivided, has passed out of her possession. The lots are worth a fortune. And if there's anybody in the neighborhood more in need of money than she is I don't know who it is."

"She must have known," says Dave, "that old Kamp was paying the taxes on her land."

"As I recall," says Aunt Maggie, "they're distant relatives. So it's quite probable that she was led to believe that he was helping her."

"But why is it," says Ted, "that you can't put men like that into jail?"

"Oh, Teddy!" Aunt Maggie spoke wearily. "Must you be reminded that poor people like us are always the 'under dogs?' Money can do anything."

"It isn't right," says Ted. "And when I

get to be President of the United States I'm going to change the laws."

"Hurrah!" yipped Dave. "There's hope for America's poor people at last."

And now let me tell you what happened after supper. For having been shut off from going to the island in the daytime, it was Friday's crazy suggestion that we tackle the smoke mystery in the dark.

"Tell me," says he, when we were halfway to the island, a squat black pile in the gathering darkness, "what does a ghost do when it isn't scaring people?"

"Well, that depends," says Ted. "Some ghosts, I suppose, are carpenter ghosts. And others are blacksmith ghosts. So it's natural to conclude that when they aren't dishing out the customary spooky stuff they put in their time building ghost houses and shoeing ghost horses."

"And the lady ghosts, I suppose," says Friday, "keep house and make pickles and do dressmaking."

"Precisely," says Ted.

"What was Penny Hibbard?" says Friday. "A blacksmith?"

"As I recall," says Ted, "he was a grave digger."

"Wough!" says Friday, letting on that he was scared. "I don't want to meet that bird. For he might dig a hole and flop me into it."

Pretty soon we came to the island.

"See any ghosts?" says Ted, in a whisper.

"Too early," says Friday. "They're just eating supper."

It was getting darker every minute.

"Listen to the bugs," says I.

"The swamp's full of them," says Ted.

"They sound like swarms of bees," says Friday.

"What was that?" I breathed.

"A screech owl," says Ted.

Then did we ever stiffen! For out of the dark swamp came a faint cry for help.

"It's Penny Hibbard's ghost!" cried Friday.

"Keep still," says Ted, listening.

"Help! Help!" came the voice.

Standing up, Ted cupped his hands to his mouth.

"Hello," he cried. "Are you a ghost?"

Friday almost fell out of the boat.

"*Good* night!" he yipped. "Whoever heard of anybody talking that way to a ghost?"

"Who are you?" Ted cried again.

"Help!" cried the voice, only fainter this time.

"What's the matter with you?" cried Ted.

"I'm sinking in the mud. Come quick."

"It may be a ghost," Ted turned to us. "But I don't believe it. Anyway, I'm going in."

"You'll never come out alive," I told him, in a shaky voice.

"I'll risk it."

I offered him my coat.

"You'll need it," says I, thinking of the mosquitoes. "And you better tie this handkerchief over your mouth."

Thus fixed up he stepped from the boat and plunged into the swamp. He told us afterwards that the mosquitoes came at him in dense swarms. He told us, too, about the mud holes that he fell into and the surface roots that he stumbled over. But he kept on.

"Where are you?" he called, his voice reaching us faintly.

"Over here," came the reply. "I can get out if you'll give me your hand."

Friday and I waited at the edge of the swamp. And with the mystery in mind we kind of expected queer developments. So, as you can imagine, it was considerable of a disappointment to us when the swamp victim turned out to be the man who had asked us about the lots.

"I foolishly went into the swamp in search of ferns," he told us, when we dragged him into the boat.

He was too dazed to know where he belonged. So we took him back to the farmhouse. Which all happened between eight-thirty and nine-thirty. Shortly after ten a fat woman burst into the farmhouse, with a hat on one side of her head, telling us that she was the man's wife. And now he's on his way to the hospital.

Oh, yes, I got a post card this morning from Tail Light. But he's such a punk writer that I don't know yet whether his ma is dead or he's sleeping in a new bed. I hope it's a new bed. For his ma promised to read a book to us when we got home.

CHAPTER XIII

MORE EXCITEMENT

JULY 13—Last night when we were getting ready for bed Ted showed us the mess of mosquito bites that he had on his body. They itched like sixty, he said. So we got some dope from Aunt Maggie and fixed him up.

"I guess you know what you are, all right," says I, kind of sober-like, as I sat down on the bed beside him.

"What?" says he, shooting a grin at me.

"A hero," says I solemnly, thinking to myself that he had the best grin and the manliest eyes of any boy I ever knew.

He let out a yip.

"Do you hear that?" he called across the room to Friday, who was seated on the other bed picking his toenails. "Trigger says I'm a hero."

"You are," says Friday, sleuthing a hunk of dirt on his big toe. "And if I knew Mr. Carnegie's address I'd write to him and tell him to send you a hero medal."

"You seem to overlook the fact," says Ted, more quiet now, "that I know that swamp like a book. I've been all through it in the winter time when it's frozen. And I've been through a lot of it in the summer time. So I wasn't taking any chances. If you must know the truth, though," he gave a queer laugh, "I was kind of shaky until I touched the man's hand. I knew then that he wasn't a ghost."

"And we thought," says I, heaving a disappointed sigh, "that we were going to solve the smoke mystery!"

"Now that old Kamp owns the island," says Ted thoughtfully, "we may never solve the mystery."

"I've got an idea," Friday piped up.

"Don't let it get away," says Ted.

"Ghosts know everything. They know what's happened in the past and what's going to happen in the future. Having lost his own life in the swamp, Penny Hibbard, now a real nice ghost with a kind disposition and everything, knew weeks ago that this other geezer was going to get mired there. It was all arranged in the book of Fate, or whatever you call it. And so the phantom-smoke show was put on for our benefit, to arouse our curi-

osity and draw us over there at just the right time."

"Then you think," says Ted, acting as though he half believed the crazy theory, "that we've seen the phantom smoke for the last time?"

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised," says Friday.

We went to bed then and slept soundly till Aunt Maggie dragged us out this morning at six bells.

Ted got his eyes on my kite string.

"Whoopee!" says he. "Let's build a kite."

Which we did. But when we flew the kite, with the wind blowing it in the direction of the island, you never saw such a crazy acting thing in all your life. First it would dart into the sky, as though it was headed straight for the moon and expected to get there in ten minutes. Then it would swish its ragged tail and shoot earthward.

"What's the matter with it?" says Ted, kind of disappointed-like.

"You ought to know," says Friday. "For you're the guy who designed it."

"Maybe the frame is too heavy," says Ted.

"Look!" cried Friday, pointing. "It's now trying to shake itself to pieces."

Snap! went the string.

"Good-by kite," says Ted sorrowfully.

Fluttering earthward, like a huge white leaf, the kite was caught in a gust of wind and carried farther toward the island. Then it disappeared among the big basswood trees.

Even if it had been worth chasing after we probably couldn't have found it. So we sort of kissed it good-by. And winding up the balance of the string we meandered up the hill to the farmhouse.

Dave had been to town to buy groceries. And when we met him in the lane he was grinning from ear to ear.

"I just heard," says he, "that old Kamp has struck a snag in the sale of his lots. He can't give a clear title to them."

"What's a clear title?" Ted inquired.

"Every piece of property," Dave explained, "has a title. And when the land changes hands the title is made out in favor of the new owner. You might kill a man and occupy his land. But you could never prove ownership to it. For the title would be made out in the murdered man's name. *He* would have to sign off to you before you could prove ownership."

"Hot dog!" cried Ted, tickled, of course, to learn that the crooked real estate man had struck a snag. "I guess this isn't such a one-

sided country to live in after all. The poor people have a chance."

Later Aunt Maggie got some added news about old Kamp over the telephone.

"As I understand it," she told us, "the property should have been put up for public tax sale two years ago last July at the county seat. But Mr. Kamp has a friend in office. And through this crooked official he arranged to have the property turned over to him."

"The scoundrel!" says Dave, with flashing eyes.

"As Alvin Kamp told Ted," Aunt Maggie went on, "his father has been paying the taxes on the land for more than twenty years. He thought that he could get a tax deed title to it in that way. Failing, he let the taxes go unpaid and then framed up the pretended sale with the county official. My neighbor, Mrs. Lawyer Bell, just told me that Kamp has no legal right to the island at all. But I suppose the old shyster will be around to get Mrs. Kelly's signature to some kind of a one-sided document that will give him everything."

Ted began to jump up and down.

"Let's bring her over here, Aunt Maggie. Can't we?"

"But why should you want her brought here?"

"We can kind of protect her. See? And if old Kamp comes around with papers for her to sign we'll knock his block off."

"Goodness gracious!" says Aunt Maggie, looking kind of uneasy. "I don't want to get mixed up in a neighborhood row."

"Please," Ted coaxed.

"Well, all right," Aunt Maggie gave in. "But I want it thoroughly understood, Teddy Dixon, that I'm managing this affair. And you are *not* to knock Mr. Kamp's block off, or anybody else's block."

Then, with Ted in the lead, we cut across the fields to Mrs. Kelly's house.

"Land o' livin'!" cried the crippled Irish lady, when we tumbled in on her. "What is the meanin' of all this disturbance?"

"Has he been here yet?" Ted panted.

"*Him?*" says the old lady, leaning on her cane. "What him?"

"Mr. Kamp."

The old lady's eyes filled with tears as the wrong that had been done her was thus brought freshly to mind. And feeling suddenly weak she sought a chair.

"Oh, Teddy!" she dabbed at her wrinkled cheeks. "Have ye bin told how he cheated me out of me land? The blackguard! An' now that he's buildin' roads an' layin' out lots on

me property, very sinsible is he to keep out of me sight. Fur if I ever got me hands on him I'd scratch his eyes out."

"Then he hasn't been here this morning?" Ted cried happily.

"This *mornin'*, ye say? I wish he *would* come here this mornin'. Sure, I'd have the teakettle full of hot water fur him."

Told then that we had come to take her over to the farmhouse, and why, she sprang to her feet with new strength.

"Glory be!" she cried. "The good Lord has taken sides with me at last."

It took us quite a while to pick up her things. And I want to tell you that my heart was in my mouth, as the saying is. For I expected every second to hear old Blunderbuss drive into the yard. But we got away from the house before he showed up, locking the doors behind us. And ten minutes later the appreciative old lady was parked in a comfortable chair on the farmhouse porch.

But we got her inside in a jiffy when old Kamp drove down the lane. The poor old lady! She was trembling like a leaf.

Crouching behind a lilac bush we saw the important acting visitor get out of his car and sort of start toward the house. Then, when

Aunt Maggie came to the front door in answer to his sharp knock, we crept closer.

"Um. . . . Good afternoon, madam. Is Mrs. Kelly here?"

"Yes, sir," says Aunt Maggie, sort of blocking the doorway.

"I'd like to speak with her."

"She isn't feeling very well this afternoon. And I urged her to lie down and rest. May I inquire the purpose of your visit?"

"I want to talk with her about this new property of mine."

"What new property?"

"The island."

"That isn't your property at all," says Aunt Maggie, sort of indignant-like. "And you know it, too."

"I've bin payin' the taxes on that land fur the past twenty-two years," the man raised his voice. "And if Mrs. Kelly didn't want me to have the land, why did she let me go ahead and spend my money?"

"Mrs. Kelly is both old and uninformed."

"She knew that I was payin' out my money year after year."

"But you never told her that you did it to get possession of her property."

"Madam," says the visitor, after a short

pause, "I'm not goin' to argue this matter with *you.* I come here to see Mrs. Kelly. And I want you to produce her."

"You can't see her to-day," says Aunt Maggie firmly.

"You think you're goin' to stop me, huh?" the man spoke angrily.

"This is my home," says Aunt Maggie.

"I kin bring a lawyer here."

"Let us know when you're coming," says Aunt Maggie spunkily, "and we'll have a lawyer, too."

"Um . . . I guess," the man kind of pulled in his horns, "that we're both lettin' our tempers needlessly git away from us. As I say, I've paid out a lot of money in taxes on that land; and three years ago I bid it in when it was put up for sale on account of unpaid taxes. So it's mine."

"It never was put up for sale," says Aunt Maggie hotly. "The county treasurer accepted your personal check for the taxes due; but it wasn't a legal proceeding at all. That is why you can't show a clear title to the land. What you're after now, I suppose, is to get a quit-claim deed—and as an inducement for Mrs. Kelly to sign in your favor you're probably willing to offer her a few hundred dollars for

land that is worth thousands of dollars. Well, I can tell you this much, Mr. Kamp: The old lady has friends who will stand by her and protect her interests. That's all I have to say to *you*. So if you'll excuse me I'll go back to my work."

We were hiding behind the barn when the defeated man got angrily into his automobile and drove away. This evening Mr. and Mrs. Bell dropped in for a short visit. And I overheard the lawyer telling Aunt Maggie that Mrs. Kelly could recover her land if she paid her debt to Kamp. The money that he paid out for taxes, and the interest amounts to almost eight hundred dollars.

Gee! I wish I had eight hundred dollars. I'd see then that the old lady got her land back. I'd fire the money in old Kamp's face, also.

He and that overbearing son of his are a good pair.

Oh, yes, I had another post card to-day from Tail Light. He printed this one, telling me that he has a bump on his head.

So it wasn't a new bed after all!

CHAPTER XIV

BACK TO THE ISLAND

JULY 14—This being Sunday I was in hopes that Aunt Maggie would let us snooze for another hour or two. A sort of beauty nap, as it were. But, no, sir, she got us out of bed at six bells, as usual, it being her notion that people who don't get up early in the morning soon get lazy.

And did I ever laugh at Ted, the big monkey! For he tried in every way he could (just for fun, of course) to get out of going to Sunday School.

"Say, Aunt Maggie," says he at the breakfast table, "may I have some blackberry jam on my toast?"

"Laws-a-me!" says Aunt Maggie, looking across the table at him. "You know very well that we have no blackberry jam in the house."

"But don't you think we *ought* to have some?" says he.

"How silly!"

"I know how we can get some, Aunt Maggie."

"Money would supply us with many things—if we had it to spend."

"In a year or two," Dave put in, "we'll have all the blackberries and raspberries that we can use. For our new bushes are growing fine."

"Speaking of blackberry bushes," says Ted, "you should see the wild ones over in Stoner's quarry. Are they ever loaded! Why, I bet I could fill a bushel basket easy. And if I don't get them to-day they'll go to waste. For to-morrow they'll be too ripe."

Betty Jane was wise.

"Aw! . . ." says she. "You're just trying to get out of going to Sunday School. Don't you listen to him, Aunt Maggie."

But Ted wasn't headed off yet.

"We shouldn't let those blackberries go to waste, Aunt Maggie. For the Lord made them grow for people to use. And it isn't right when He hands us something like that to push it back at Him. I won't mind missing Sunday School if you think I can be of help to you in getting some nice blackberries to can."

"You'll do your blackberrying in the kitchen sink," laughed Dave.

"Goody! Goody!" cried Betty Jane, clapping her hands.

"Aw! . . . Don't make me wash up, Aunt Maggie. Just this once. Please. Besides, I've got company."

"On the Sabbath day," says Aunt Maggie, "everybody in this house goes to church, company included."

"But Mrs. Kelly isn't going."

"Mrs. Kelly is an old lady."

"Which isn't sayin', though," the aged visitor spoke for herself, "that I wouldn't like to go. But with no conveyance, me ould legs would soon give out."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Ted, rolling his eyes kind of tragic-like. "I suppose I'll have to wash the back of my neck and everything."

"If you don't," says Aunt Maggie, heartlessly, "I'll take a stick to you."

"How about me?" grinned Friday.

"We have no favorites in this house," says Aunt Maggie firmly.

When everybody was ready for church we started out in pairs, Dave and Aunt Maggie up in front, then Betty Jane and Friday, then Ted and I.

"Aunt Maggie," squawked Betty Jane. "Ted's kicking dirt on me."

"Teddy," came severely from the head of the

procession. "Will you please behave yourself?"

"Crickets! Can't I walk without you jawing me? It isn't my fault that the road's dusty."

Pretty soon there was another squawk.

"Aunt Maggie! Ted's kicking dirt again."

After which the dirt kicker was promoted to the front ranks, where his aunt could keep an eye on him.

Sunday Schools are pretty much alike, I guess. For the one we went to in Canbridge was a good deal like our Methodist Sunday School at home, only the preacher had a wart on the end of his nose.

Coming home, I read my Sunday School paper. Then, when dinner was over, I got out a book that I had brought along. It was too exciting to put aside. So, when Ted and Friday suggested a row on the lake, I told them to help themselves—I preferred to stay at home, I said, and read. Which I did.

Later they brought back word that they had spotted our lost kite. And now it's Ted's crazy notion to go over there to-morrow night (when young Kamp isn't around!) and get it. It's high up in a big basswood tree. But he

never saw the tree yet, he bragged to us, that *he* couldn't climb.

July 15—It's going to eleven o'clock. And we just got home from the island. Aunt Maggie was waiting for us at the kitchen door. But she soon quit jawing at us when we told her what we had seen and heard.

As I wrote down last evening, it was Ted's scheme to go over to the island to-night and get his kite. Not that it was worth lugging home. But you know how kids are. So, grabbing a rope and a couple of flashlights we piled into the rowboat shortly after eight o'clock and set forth.

It was good and dark by the time we got to the island. So, in landing, we switched on our flashlights.

"Is that the tree you're going to climb?" says I, when the others, after a sort of circuitous course through the bushes, stopped beside a huge basswood.

"Sure thing," says Ted. Then, training the flashlight into the overhead branches, he pointed out the kite.

"But where's the tail?" says I, stretching my neck.

"Hanging in that big crotch."

"*Good* night!" I yipped. "You'll never be able to climb that tree. For it's as big as the *Swiss Family Robinson* tree that we were talking about the other day."

Friday thumped the trunk with a rock.

"Doesn't it sound hollow to you, Trigger?"

"Sure thing," says I.

"That's what I tell Ted."

"Until Mrs. Kelly gets the island back," says Ted, "the tree might just as well have a cast-iron heart for all the use we can make of it."

"Just the same," says Friday, "I'd like to know if it *is* hollow."

"Thump it again," says I.

Which he did.

"It sounds just like your head," says I.

"Can't we cut a hole in it?" says he.

"I suppose we could," says Ted, "if we had an ax."

"But what would old Kamp say?" says I, kind of uneasy-like.

"He'd never know who did it," says Friday, "if the three of us kept shut."

"There might be secret eyes," says I, looking around.

"Yah," laughed Friday, "ghosts' eyes."

"Is it true," I then turned to Ted, "that old Penny Hibbard got stuck in the swamp and died?"

"Sure thing."

"Tell us about it," says Friday.

"Well," says Ted, "there isn't a great deal to tell. According to Mrs. Kelly's story he was an old miser. Did queer things, too. In buying stuff in the stores he always asked for his change in pennies, which explains how he got the name of Penny Hibbard, his real name being Jed Hibbard. When it became an accepted fact that he had died in the swamp, his body having sunk out of sight in the muck, there was a grand treasure hunt in which Mrs. Kelly, a relative of his, took part. But his hidden fortune never was found."

"And is that why Mrs. Kelly is so poor?" Friday inquired.

"Sure thing. She thought that she was going to be rich when her uncle died. But all she inherited was land on which she couldn't afford to pay the taxes. As for the hidden fortune itself, a lot of people still believe that he had it with him, in pennies, when he sank in the swamp. Maybe it was the pennies that weighted him down."

"I still don't see," says Friday, kind of

puzzled-like, "what he was doing in the swamp."

"He hung around there a great deal," says Ted. "It was the trees, I guess."

"Meaning which?" says Friday.

"People who knew the old man say that he was daffy over trees, the same as some collectors are daffy over bugs and butterflies. Haven't you noticed the many different kinds of trees in the swamp? Well, old Penny set out a lot of them—they never grew there natural."

The island was dark and spooky, as I say. And with the swamp only a few yards away I had the uneasy feeling that more than one hungry old snake was watching us with glittering green eyes.

Suddenly Friday let out one of his six-cylinder squawks.

"Look!" he cried, pointing into the swamp. "There's a light."

Gosh! I never came so near fainting in all my life. For, as I say, I was kind of shaky anyway.

"Where?" says Ted quickly. "I don't see it."

"There it is," says Friday, as the light came on again.

All I could think of was Penny Hibbard's ghost.

"Let's get out of here," I cried.

"Don't be a calf," says Ted.

"But if it's old Penny's ghost," I cried, "we're liable to get our blocks knocked off."

"Ghost your granny," says Ted. "It's an auto."

I remembered then about the new road that had been built through the swamp.

"Do you suppose it's old Kamp himself?" says I, as the lights of the car again went out.

"Probably," says Ted shortly.

"Let's go over and find out what he's up to," says Friday.

"No, thanks," says I. "I think too much of the seat of my pants."

"Shucks!" says Friday. "We can hide in the dark and listen."

CHAPTER XV

WHAT WE OVERHEARD

JULY 15 (*Continued*)—So we started out, sort of picking our way among the trees and bushes. And was it ever dark! Br-r-r-r! I expected every minute to step on something soft and wiggly. Once a limb slapped me on the ankle and I jumped three feet. Ted hissed at me, telling me to cut out the comedy. But if that's his idea of comedy I'd sure hate to get mixed up in real tragedy. By the time I got home, I told myself, my hair would be snow white, like the imprisoned queen whose hair turned white overnight.

Pretty soon we came to the new road. And scared to death now that we'd bump into something in the dark we picked our steps more cautiously than ever.

Then, as we caught the sound of a deep grumbling voice, we dropped flat on our stomachs beside the road. And there we lay, side by side, our hands touching, scarcely daring to breathe.

"It hain't no use, Collins. They's somethin' the matter with the wirin'. Fur every time I put in a new fuse it burns out."

"Try again," says another deep voice.

"How kin I when I hain't got no more fuses?"

It was old Kamp, all right. His voice gave him away. But who was the other man? And what were they doing here at this time of night?

"Let *me* try it, Pa," a boy's voice spoke up. "Maybe I can fix it."

Young pug-nose! So *he* was here, too! Well! Well! A sort of family party, as you might say.

"You jest keep your hands to yourself," growled old Blunderbuss. "If anybody happens to ask you, nine-tenths of the trouble that I have with this car is due to you monkeyin' with it. So git away from it and keep away."

"But how are we going to get home?" says Collins, kind of worried-like.

"Humph!" grunted old Blunderbuss. "You've still got legs, hain't you?"

"But we're liable to get lost in the swamp."

"Not if we follow the new road."

Collins gave a disgusted grunt.

"Of all the rotten luck," says he.

"Well," old Blunderbuss grunted in pattern, "who suggested comin' here?"

"I did, of course. For I was curious to see how the new road was coming along. I never dreamed, though, that we'd get hung up this way."

"It's a good car," old Blunderbuss felt called upon to defend the family chariot. "I paid a hundred and fifty dollars fur it."

"You could afford a better car," says Collins.

I got Ted's ear.

"Is he the county official?" I whispered, remembering what Aunt Maggie had told us.

"I think so."

We missed some of the talk between the two men. Then old Blunderbuss raised his voice.

"Yes, sir," says he, kind of biting off the words, "if ever they was a time in my life when I wanted to take a woman and shake her it was last Saturday afternoon when I was talkin' to that old maid. The meddlesome critter! She's the one who's standin' in my way now."

"Then you really think," says Collins, "that you could have gotten Mrs. Kelly's signature to your paper if it hadn't been for the other woman's interference?"

"Absolutely," says old Blunderbuss. "Fur I've got a good proposition to offer her."

There was a short silence.

"Say, Kamp," says Collins, "what would it be worth to you if I arranged a private meeting between you and Mrs. Kelly?"

"Kin you do it?" says old Blunderbuss eagerly.

"I rather imagine I can, if——"

"If what?"

"If you pay me my price."

I could almost hear old Blunderbuss' pocket-book screeching for help as he pinched it harder than ever.

"Um . . . I'm awful short of money jest now, Collins. Fur these improvements have cost me a heap more than I figured on."

"How much have you spent here?"

"Oh! . . . Somethin' like three thousand dollars."

"You have forty lots."

"Well? . . ."

"You told me yourself that you expected to get a thousand dollars apiece for them. That's forty thousand dollars. All right. If you can get forty thousand dollars for the land you can afford to put six or eight thousand dollars into it."

Old Blunderbuss, though, tight-wad that he was, didn't like the sound of that "six or eight thousand dollars."

"What do you mean?" says he, kind of guarded-like.

"You're holding my note for two thousand dollars."

"Yes, yes. But I hain't a-pressin' you, Collins. I'm givin' you all the time you want. And, as your friend, I'm chargin' you only five per cent."

"If you'll agree to cancel my note," says Collins, "I'll help you."

"What?" old Blunderbuss finally found his voice. "Give you two thousand dollars?"

"That's my price," says Collins.

"No, no. I kain't do it. I hain't made of money, Collins."

"Listen here, Kamp: I know your game. You're virtually stealing this land. Yes, you are! You came to me——"

"Jest a minute, Collins," old Blunderbuss interrupted. Then he spoke to the family nest egg. "See what you kin do with the lights, Alvin. Mr. Collins and I have some business to talk over. And you needn't go stretchin' your ears, nuther. Do you understand?"

Pug-nose raised the motor hood.

"I should worry what you talk about," says he.

"All right, Collins," says old Blunderbuss.

"As I was saying, you came to me with your

scheme—though you were very careful not to tell me everything!—and I agreed to help you. Owing you money, I couldn't very well do otherwise. Now, against my advice you went ahead with these improvements—you were so greedy to get your hands on the property, to turn it into money, that you couldn't wait the law's required three years in order to qualify for a clear title. So if you lose the money that you've put into the land, in the way of improvements, I haven't any sympathy for you."

"But, Collins——"

"As matters stand to-day," the crooked politician went on, "the land is yours only as you hold it subject to last-minute action on Mrs. Kelly's part. The law gives her three years in which to pay up, and she still has to the end of this month. If she does pay up before the end of the month, the land reverts to her."

"But she kain't pay. She's broke."

"The point is, Kamp, that you were a fool to start these improvements until the three years were up. I told you so; but you wouldn't listen to me. Of course, if the woman fails to pay up within the required time, the land is yours—we both know that. But people are talking. Men around here who have money to

lend know the true value of this property. So where would you be if some man with money came to Mrs. Kelly to-morrow morning and offered to finance her? You'd be out in the cold, and I don't mean maybe. What you want to do—what you've *got* to do, in fact—is to get her to sign a quit-claim deed. That's your only salvation. And the quicker you get her official signature the better for your scheme. You tried to get to her last Saturday, and failed. Now, the point is, do you want me to help you, or don't you?"

"Two thousand dollars!" the old miser suffered. "Two thousand dollars!"

"That's my price," says Collins.

"I—I s'pose it's fair, everything considered. But it's a lot of money, Collins; it's a lot of money."

"Then it's a bargain?"

"Yes, yes! But it's a lot of money; a lot of money."

"Well, here's my scheme: The old maid that you mentioned has a sister living in Crocketville. To-morrow morning the farm woman will get a telegram, asking her to come to Crocketville right away. No one will suspect that we have anything to do with the message. Once the farm woman is safely out of the way

you will have the old lady at your mercy."

"As I told you before, Collins, I hain't expectin' Mrs. Kelly to sign my paper fur nothin'. I aim to do the right thing by her."

"Of course," says Collins, kind of dry-like.

"I'm willin' to pay her a thousand dollars in cash."

"She'll sign for a thousand."

"So I figure. And now, Collins, I want to correct a statement that you made a moment ago. You said I was tryin' to steal this land. That hain't so. I'm payin' fur it. The mere fact that I kin buy it fur a small part of what it's worth is jest shrewd business on my part. Without the new road the island hain't worth a hundred dollars. But with the road the land will sell fast. Fur there's a greater demand fur lake-shore lots than ever before."

Collins gave a queer laugh.

"Oh," says he, "there's no danger of *you* losing money on the deal."

"It was me who saw the possibilities in the land, and not the owner," the old buzzard tried to give himself a coat of whitewash. "So I'm entitled to a good profit."

Collins gave another laugh.

"I'd hate to have you for an enemy, Kamp."

"Um. . . . I'm a fair man, Collins. I may

be a bit shrewd in my dealings. But I'm always fair."

Here the lights came on.

"What'd I tell you!" yipped pug-nose. "I fixed it. And now let's beat it, Pa. For I've got an early-morning date. And I'm anxious to get to bed."

"Another date, heh?" grunted Blunderbuss. "Since when did you start havin' 'em in the mornin'?"

"This is a date with a kite," laughed pug-nose.

"Meanin' which?"

"I found Ted Dixon's kite this afternoon. It's back there in a big basswood. And early to-morrow morning another kid and I are coming out here to do some tree climbing."

"You'd better be givin' your thoughts to more important stuff than kites."

"Shucks! I don't want the old kite. I just want to spite Ted Dixon."

"Spite-work don't pay," preached the old hypocrite. "You want to be fair in your dealings, like me."

We watched the car disappear down the new road in the direction of the highway.

"Yah," cried Ted, "he's fair, *he* is—like a rattlesnake."

"Let's go home and tell Aunt Maggie," says Friday excitedly.

Which we did, stirring up more excitement in the farmhouse than it had known in many years, I imagine. And now, everybody else having turned in, I guess I better jump into bed myself. For I have a hunch that to-morrow is going to be a very exciting day!

CHAPTER XVI

THE TREASURE TREE

JULY 16—I have so much to write down tonight that I hardly know where to begin. Talk about *excitement!* Oh, baby! Mrs. Kelly gave me a peck of pennies. Friday has a peck, too. And so has Ted. In addition, a liberal gob of kisses were passed around. For old ladies are keen on that kind of stuff. And having had her land restored to her for all times, through the recovery of the long-lost treasure, Mrs. Kelly is now the happiest woman in the whole world.

We really owe everything to that old kite. For if it hadn't been for the kite we never would have gone back to the island. And if we hadn't gone back last night, after I put away my diary, young Kamp undoubtedly would have found the treasure ahead of us. For you know what his plans were!

Like I wrote down last night, I wound up my diary for the day and rolled into bed. But I couldn't go to sleep. Things kept jumping

around in my head. And pretty soon I got to thinking about that final crack of young Kamp's.

So I got out of bed and grabbed Ted by the nose.

"You forgot something," I told him.

"What?" says he, sitting up.

"You left your rope dangling in that big basswood tree."

"What of it?" says he. "We can get it to-morrow."

"Yah," says I, "if pug-nose doesn't get it ahead of you."

He saw then what I was driving at.

"The old kite isn't any good," says he, jumping out of bed. "But I'd row many miles, night or day, before I'd give it up to that young smart aleck. . . . Are you game to go back to the island, Trigger?"

"Nothing else but," says I.

"How about Friday?"

"It would be a shame," says I, "to break up that melodious snore."

So, deciding to leave Friday in bed, we dressed and tiptoed down the carpeted stairs, realizing, of course, that we'd be out of luck if Aunt Maggie heard us. But everything was lovely.

Safe outside, we scooted for the lake. Then, tumbling into the rowboat we headed for the island—and, I might add, the greatest adventure of my lifetime. Hidden treasure! A human skeleton! Excitement galore! As Ted said afterwards, it was like a chapter from *Treasure Island.*

Coming to the foot of the big basswood tree, which towered in the darkness like an unfriendly giant, I held the flashlight while Ted shinned up the rope, which earlier had been thrown over one of the lower limbs.

Up he went, from limb to limb, until he finally came to the kite. Then I heard him give a cry.

"Trigger! You ought to see the big hole up here."

"Hole?" says I. "What kind of a hole?"

"It opens into the trunk of the tree."

"Then it's really hollow?" says I excitedly.

"Boy, I'll tell the world it's hollow! The trunk is hardly more than a shell."

"Maybe it's a bear's den," says I.

There was another cry.

"Trigger! I can see a skeleton."

"Is it alive?" says I, so excited that I never realized what a crazy thing I was saying.

"Don't be goofy."

"Where is it?" says I.

"In the hole, of course."

"Not a *man's* skeleton," says I, kind of breathless-like.

"Nothing else but."

I grabbed the rope.

"Here I come," says I.

"Do you suppose," says he, "that it's Penny Hibbard's skeleton? They never really proved that the old man died in the swamp. That was just a sort of conclusion. And he knew these trees like people. Maybe he dropped into the hole and couldn't get out."

A skeleton in a hollow tree! Maybe, I told myself in added excitement, there was something in the tree besides a skeleton! Maybe we had solved the mystery of the penny hoarder's vanished fortune!

Ted waited until I climbed the rope. Then he dropped the rope into the yawning hole.

"The one whose birthday adds up the most," says he, "goes down first."

"Make it plainer," says I.

"When's your birthday?"

"The last day of May."

"Three and one are four," says he.

"And when's yours?" says I, catching onto his scheme.

" TRIGGER! I CAN SEE A SKELETON."

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree. *Page* 142

"The sixteenth of May."

"You win," says I.

So down he went.

"Trigger!" he cried from the bottom, his voice sounding kind of weird and choked-like in the hollow tree. "There's bushels of pennies down here. Look at 'em!"

I could hear the coins clink as they filtered through his fingers.

"Fill your pockets," I told him.

"*Pockets?*" says he. Then he gave a crazy laugh. "I need a million tubs and pails."

The skeleton began to weave.

"Look out!" I yipped. "Or you'll need a million calla lilies."

But I didn't yip soon enough. And did he ever screech when the bony frame sort of collapsed on top of him.

"Get a shovel," he squawked, "and dig me out. I'm buried in bones."

There was a bigger job here than the two of us could handle. We realized that, all right. So while he guarded the tree I hurried back to the farmhouse, getting Friday and Dave out of bed. They thought at first that I was kidding. But I soon convinced them, and Aunt Maggie, too, that I was telling the truth. Ted and I had indeed found the penny hoarder's

long-lost fortune. More than that, we had solved the mystery of the miser's death—or at least we thought we had!

"All my life," says Aunt Maggie, her eyes reminding me of twin stars, "I've wanted to do something romantic. And I can think of nothing more fascinating than a treasure tree. So, if you boys don't mind, I'd love to go along with you, to take part in the treasure's recovery."

"Hot dog!" cried Dave.

Then, taking turns, we hugged the tar out of her, after which we all lit out for the lake shore, making the trip to the island in two boats, Dave rowing one and me the other. Nor did we forget to take along plenty of pails and tubs.

Dave soon had a hole chopped in the tree. For, as Ted had said, the trunk was a mere shell. Crawling inside, Friday and Ted scooped up the pennies with dippers, handing the loaded dippers to us through the hole, we, in turn, dumping the pennies into the provided pails and tubs. We worked for hours. And then, having emptied the tree of its treasure, we lugged the pennies to the shore, where our boats were waiting. There was a lot of excited talk. But I haven't bothered to write it down.

The big point is that we landed the treasure safely at the farmhouse pier, later lugging the loaded pails up the hill to the house.

Completely tuckered out, Aunt Maggie laid down at three-thirty to get some needed sleep. But the rest of us sat up and counted pennies. Had we counted them all one by one, as we set out to do, I dare say we would be counting yet. But Ted contrived the clever scheme of weighing them, having learned that it took approximately one hundred and fifty of them to make a pound. Altogether we handled more than three hundred thousand pennies. A whole ton, mind you! Just think of that!

It was a happy gang, let me tell you, that later gathered around Aunt Maggie's breakfast table. And old Mrs. Kelly, hearing the story of the treasure's recovery for the first time, was the happiest of all.

When breakfast was over she called for a peck measure. And it was then that we got our reward.

Pretty soon the telephone rang.

"Hey, Aunt Maggie!" yipped Ted. "Come quick! It's a telegram."

"Dear me!" says Aunt Maggie, giving us a wink. "I do hope it isn't bad news from Crocketville."

We hung around her until she hung up the receiver.

"Is my ma dead?" says Friday, putting on a long face.

"I've been led to believe," says Aunt Maggie, with twinkling eyes, "that she's quite ill."

"And what now?" Dave asked his aunt.

"I think," says she, "that I better call up Lawyer Bell."

Which she did. And later, when old Kamp drove into the yard, we all hid in the kitchen.

CHAPTER XVII

HOME AGAIN

JULY 16 (*Continued*)—"Um . . ." says old Blunderbuss, when Mrs. Kelly met him at the front door. "I jest stopped in to have a talk with you 'bout the property that we're both int'rested in."

"Have a seat," says Mrs. Kelly politely.

"You understand, of course, what property I refer to."

"Yes, indeed," says the old lady.

"Have you—ah—bin talkin' with anyone else 'bout buyin' the island from you, or loanin' you money on it?"

"No, sir," says the old lady.

Which, of course, was good news to old Blunderbuss.

"Um . . ." says he, sort of purring to himself like a gorged cat. "I'm very glad to hear that; very glad indeed. I trust you're feelin' well, Cousin Clara."

"Mrs. Kelly, if you please," says the old lady stiffly.

"As you know," old Blunderbuss got down to business, "I began payin' the taxes on the land years ago, figurin' that this would give me first call on the property. Now, I want to take it off your hands, at a fair price, and save you the worry of lookin' after it."

"Sure, I'll sell the land to ye in a minute if I kin git me price fur it," says the old lady.

"You realize, of course, that the isolated, undeveloped land isn't worth very much. I should say that five hundred dollars would be a big price fur it."

"Never," says the old lady firmly, "will I sell that fine piece of lake-shore property fur five hundred dollars."

"But you must remember, Mrs. Kelly, that you already owe me considerable money."

"An' havin' spoken of it," says the old lady, "suppose ye tell me the exact amount."

"Um . . . I have it written down in my notebook."

We could hear him thumbing through a book.

"Seven hundred and fifty-eight dollars and ninety-seven cents," says he.

"So businesslike of ye," says the old lady dryly, "not to omit the cents."

"By payin' you five hundred dollars more, the land will cost me approximately twelve hun-

dred and sixty dollars. Which really is more than it's worth."

"But if ye feel that way about it," says the old lady shrewdly, "why are ye so anxious to buy it?"

"As members of a common family," says the old hypocrite, "we owe a duty to each other."

"Your magnanimity," says the old lady, "almost overwhelms me."

"I'm glad you realize, Mrs. Kelly, that I have your best interests at heart."

"An' how would it be," the proposition was then put up to him, "if I borrowed the money an' paid ye off?"

"You'd only find the property a burden, Mrs. Kelly," says he smoothly. "And in time you'd have to give it up. So why not sell it to me, as I suggest? As a matter of fact, this being a sort of family affair, I had fully intended payin' you five hundred dollars and giving you another five hundred dollars as a present. See? Here is the money in ten-dollar bills—a hundred of them. And it's all yours—the five hundred dollars in payment fur the land and an additional five hundred dollars as a present. All you've got to do is to sign this document."

The paper sort of rustled as he spread it

before her, having temptingly put the big wad of ten-dollar bills into her lap.

But the old lady wasn't teetotally dumb.

"I'll sign no papers now," says she, "nor take any money from ye. But if ye wish I'll call at your office later in the day."

"It is to your interests to close the deal now, Mrs. Kelly. Fur I may change my mind 'bout givin' you that extra five hundred dollars if I have to wait."

"No," says the old lady firmly.

"But, Mrs. Kelly——"

"There are no 'buts,'" says the old lady, showing by the tone of her voice that she had no intention of changing her mind.

"Very well," says old Blulnderbuss, gathering up his wealth. "I'll see you in town sometime before evenin'."

Here we caught sight of young pug-nose coming down the lane on his bicycle.

"Hey, Pa," cried smarty, when his father met him at the front door. "You haven't paid the old lady any money, have you?"

"Sh-h-h-h!" says old Blunderbuss. Then he stepped outside. "What brings you here?" he inquired.

"Mr. Collins just called up. In going through his papers this morning he found out

that you closed the island deal three years ago to-day at eleven-thirty, and not on the last day of the month, as you thought. So all you've got to do is to wait till eleven-thirty. And then if the old lady hasn't settled up with you the land is yours."

Climbing into his car, old Blunderbuss beat it for town, determined that Mrs. Kelly should get no chance to settle up with him, even if she found a backer.

But that is where he got fooled. For, as I have mentioned, Aunt Maggie had hired Lawyer Bell, who wound up things in short order.

Getting the lawyer's orders over the telephone, we weighed up five hundred and ten pounds of pennies and carted them to town in a borrowed lumber wagon. Her debt thus paid, Mrs. Kelly put the balance of the pennies (excepting our three pecks, of course) into the bank, where, I dare say, the clerks counted until they were blue in the face.

Furious when Lawyer Bell started to pay him off in pennies, Kamp at first refused to take them. But he finally pulled in his horns. For Lawyer Bell knows his stuff. As for the crooked county treasurer, I hear that he skinned out.

Oh, yes, I mustn't forget to write down about

the skeleton. It was a professional skeleton, a Canbridge doctor told us, pointing out the wires that had held the bones together. Mrs. Kelly recalled then that old Penny's father had practiced medicine. Why the miser (who probably died in the swamp, after all) put the skeleton into the hollow tree, no one will ever know. Yet that act was no queerer than the collection of the pennies themselves.

Having completed our week's visit, Friday's pa carted us back to Crocketville this afternoon, pennies and all. Slats and Tail Light were glad to see us. But I wasn't half as glad to see them as I was to see my swell ma and pa. Boy, did I ever give my ma a hugging!

And to-night I'm going to sleep in my own bed, under the foot of which I have hid my peck of pennies. It's pretty swell to have a peck of pennies under the bed. I'll always have spending money now.

CHAPTER XVIII

FAME AND FORTUNE

JULY 17—I had been wondering for several days before I went away when we'd get the reward due us for capturing the robber. No one seemed in any hurry to pay us. But everything is all settled now. For we have the money in the bank.

Two hundred dollars, mind you! That's a lot of money for four boys to own. Just think of all the swell things we can buy, such as marbles and jaw-breakers and licorice. If we spend the money for licorice we'll have forty thousand sticks. Ten thousand sticks apiece. Just think of that! Slats, though, who has a better business head than the rest of us, says that we should invest the money instead of spending it. So to-night we called a special meeting to talk it over.

Joining the others in Friday's barn, I noticed a queer smell. And when I asked Friday about it he said it was dead rats. His pa had put out rat poison, he said, and after gobbling up

the poison the rats had all crowded under the barn to sort of sympathize with each other in their dying moments.

Bright kid that he is, Slats quickly settled on a scheme for investing our money when he got a whiff of the dead rats.

"As you can see," says he, taking the floor, "it's all wrong for people to poison rats and mice. It isn't sanitary."

"But what's that got to do with our two hundred bucks?" says Friday.

"A better way," Slats went on, warming up to the scheme that had taken shape in his mind, "is to trap the rats and bury them."

Then he suggested that we go into the rat-catching business, calling ourselves the Crocketville Sanitary Rat Killer Company.

"When the people who have rats to be killed hear about us," he wound up, "we will get a lot of business and make money fast."

"*Good* night nurse!" squawked Friday. "Is that the best kind of a scheme you can think up?"

"It's a good scheme," says Slats.

Friday waggled kind of sad-like.

"Now I know it's true," says he.

"What?" says Slats.

"That you fell out of bed when you were a baby and landed on your head."

But though the rest of us laughed at this joke Slats saw nothing funny in it.

"A storekeeper invests his money and doubles it," says he. "So why can't we?"

"I'm in favor of starting up a store," says Friday. "I'd love to own a candy store."

"Or a peanut store," piped up Tail Light.

"You better shut up about peanuts," yelled Slats, "after what happened to *you*."

"And you're really sincere," I asked the leader, "about this rat-catching scheme?"

"Absolutely and nothing else but," says he earnestly.

As further explained to us, it was his scheme to invest our money in traps and cheese. Then we could call on the Crocketville people and offer to catch their rats for a cent apiece, and do it sanitary.

Well, we began to see some sense to the scheme after a bit. And pretty soon we were just as tickled over it as its originator was. So it was agreed that we were to buy the traps and cheese the first thing in the morning and get busy.

"For the sooner we start," Slats wound up, "the sooner we'll get rich."

"Don't tell me," says Friday, "that you're going to spend all of our jack for traps and cheese."

"It may take ten dollars for the traps," says Slats, kind of thoughtful-like, "and another ten dollars for the advertising."

"What kind of advertising?"

"Handbills."

"It sounds like a joke," says Friday. "Still, we may be able to do it."

"If anybody happens to ask you," says Slats, "it's a swell scheme. And you're lucky that I thought of it."

"If you hadn't," says Friday, kind of chesty-like, "I would have. For everybody knows that next to you I'm the smartest boy in town."

"In our handbills," Slats went on, "we'll tell the people about our new company and how we catch rats and mice for a cent apiece."

"Only a cent?" says Friday. "I should think we ought to get five cents for rats if we get a cent apiece for mice. For rats are more than five times as big."

"Let us start with a flat rate of a cent apiece," says Slats. "And then if we get rushed we can raise our prices."

In drawing for offices Friday and I got the separate "Secretary" and "Treasurer" slips. Slats luckily drew the "General Manager" slip (if he hadn't he probably would have bossed the business, anyway), which left Tail Light

with the hefty job of Advertising Manager. But as he knew even less about advertising than a hog does about war, we very obligingly relieved him of the job of writing the handbill. Here it is:

CAN YOU CATCH A RAT?

We can. Our business is catching rats and mice. One of our experienced rat catchers will call on you to-day and tell you all about it, and how you can get your rats and mice caught for a cent apiece, which is dirt cheap. Give us a trial. Satisfaction guaranteed and no bad smells like when you poison them.

Crocketville Sanitary Rat Killer Company

Which, I thought, was a swell piece of advertising. And I was all excited thinking how easily I was going to get rich. There are at least five hundred houses in Crocketville. Figuring ten rats and mice per house per week, our weekly earnings should be around fifty dollars. In ten weeks we'd earn five hundred dollars. Mr. Ford, I bet you, never made money any faster than that.

It's agreed that we are to have separate routes. For instance, taking Walnut Street as my route, I will call at all the houses where

we are giving sanitary rat killer service, setting the traps and taking away the dead rats in my Comet Coaster.

That tells everything, I guess. We think we have a pretty slick scheme. To-morrow night I will write down how we come out. I wish Crocketville was bigger. I wish we had a thousand houses instead of only five hundred. That would mean a weekly profit of one hundred dollars.

Gee-miny crickets! Just think of that! *One hundred dollars a week!* I tell you I'm glad that I have such a swell chance to get rich and famous. I'm pretty lucky, all right. And like in the *American Magazine* I suppose some day I will have a who-is-it article written up about me, telling how I started out in life a poor boy and got to be a millionaire catching rats and mice. I guess it will be pretty swell to have my picture in the *American Magazine.* I guess my ma and my pa are going to be mighty proud of me when I grow up.

I must go to sleep now so that I can get up early to-morrow morning and start getting rich.

Oh, yes, I found out what made the mummy disappear. And was *I* ever surprised. Mummy

itch! Haw! haw! haw! That Mr. Arnoldsmith sure was a slick old bird, all right. I suppose now Jerry and his gang of Juvenile Jupiter Detectives will be looking around for another mystery to solve.

CHAPTER XIX

IN DISGRACE

JULY 18—This has been an awful hard day on me. It has been an awful exciting day, too. I doubt if I can remember all of the terrible things that happened to me. My pa says if I ever show any sense it will be on the twenty-ninth of February, which comes only once in four years.

And to think that last night when I sat here writing in my diary I was all happy and gay, thinking how I was going to get rich and have my picture published in the *American Magazine.* Now I am full of anguish, and that's all I am full of, let me tell you, for I had to go to bed without my supper. I guess I won't ever be rich. Certainly, I don't ever expect to get rich catching rats and mice.

Right after breakfast I hustled over to Slats' house, eager to get started on the road to fame and fortune. And when Friday came along the four of us went downtown.

"First of all," says Slats, "we'll have our

can-you-catch-a-rat handbill printed. Then we'll scatter this advertising around town and start taking orders for our sanitary rat killer service."

He figured, I guess, that as future rat catchers we needed a demonstration.

"Here's the way we'll work it," says he. Then, pretending that he was speaking to a lady, he removed his cap and bowed just as polite as you please. "Mrs. Smith," says he, "I represent the Crocketville Sanitary Rat Killer Company, which you have read about in our advertising."

"How do you know she read about us?" put in Friday. "Maybe she took our advertising and started a fire with it."

"If she did," says Slats, "I'll give her another handbill and wait till she reads it."

"And what if she can't read?" was Friday's further bright contribution.

I gave him a shove.

"Shut up," says I, "and let's hear the rest of it."

"As I say," Slats went on, "I'll tell Mrs. Jones that I'm a representative of the Crocketville Sanitary Rat Killer Company. And then——"

"What did she do," interrupted Friday, "get

married again while you were waiting on the front porch?"

"Who?" says Slats, looking kind of dumb.

"Mrs. Smith. At least she was Mrs. Smith when you started talking to her. But now she's Mrs. Jones."

"Knock his block off," says Slats.

"Ouch!" squawked Friday, when I socked him. "I'll shut up; I'll shut up."

"And then," Slats went on, "I'll say: 'Of course, Mrs. Jones, you will want our company to kill your rats and mice for you. So with your permission I'll leave six traps in your basement . . . or would you rather have me leave ten traps, Mrs.——"

"Brown," supplied Friday, who is a regular monkey.

Slats grinned.

"Call her Mrs. Brown if you want to. I should worry. The big point is, *get on the good side of her.* Most women like boys. So they ought to like us if we're polite. They'll be interested in us, too, when they learn how ambitious we are."

"Are we?" grinned Friday.

"The mere fact that we are in business for ourselves proves that," says Slats.

"And how many traps are we supposed to

leave at Mrs. Jones' house?" Friday further inquired.

"Eight or ten."

"And how many houses are there in town?"

"Five hundred," says I.

"Ten times five hundred is five thousand. Gee-miny crickets! Do you mean to tell me," he turned to Slats, "that you're going to buy five thousand traps?"

"Um . . ." says Slats. "We won't need that many to start with. In fact, if we work the town in sections, we won't need more than a thousand."

"Imagine four kids of our age buying a thousand traps," says Friday. "I bet it never happened before in the whole history of the world."

"All the more credit to us," says Slats. "We're developing a brand-new industry. We're what you call business pioneers."

"Daniel Boone was a pioneer, too," says Friday. "What are we supposed to do?—scalp a few Indians?"

"I'll scalp you," says Slats, "if you don't dry up. If anybody happens to ask you, your mouth is seven sizes too big for your face."

"But let's get the rest of this dope on Mrs. Smith," says I. "If she lets us leave ten traps

in her basement, what's the next step, then?"

"Having set the traps," says Slats, "we'll make the rounds to-morrow and collect a cent for each mouse and rat that we catch."

"But what if Mrs. Smith gyps us and empties the traps herself?" Friday brought up a good point.

"Does your ma hate rats?" was Slats' counter question.

"Sure thing."

"Would she take one out of a trap if she could get you to do it for a penny?"

"She wouldn't touch one for a dollar," says Friday.

"There you are," Slats gestured, figuring that Friday had answered his own question.

Pretty soon we came to the newspaper office where we gave the manager of the job-printing department the copy for our handbill, telling him that we needed a thousand of them.

He did some quick figuring.

"They'll cost you six dollars," says he.

"And when will they be ready?" says Slats.

"At nine o'clock."

On the way to the street we met Mr. Crump, the editor.

"Maybe you'd like to have some news for your newspaper," says Slats.

The editor smiled at us.

"I'm always looking for news," says he.

"We've just organized a new company," says Slats. "I'm the General Manager, Trigger is the Treasurer and Friday is the Secretary. This little squirt is the Advertising Manager."

Mr. Crump's smile broadened.

"That's news, all right," says he. "What's the name of your new company?"

We told him.

"Well, well," says he, laughing. "That's a most unusual line of business. I trust, though, that you will be successful."

Drawing twenty-five dollars out of the bank we then went over to the ten-cent store and bought seven hundred two-cent snap traps. We bought the store's whole supply. The girl who waited on us thought, I guess, that we were cuckoo. She wouldn't count the traps till I showed her our money. Having bought the traps we next stopped at a grocery store and got a big hunk of stale cheese. Stale cheese, Slats said, was just as good for our purpose as fresh cheese, and the grocer sold it to us at a big discount. We were all set now to get rich, only we hadn't any rat traps. We looked at some in a hardware store. But the price was

so high, as compared to our two-cent mouse traps, that we decided to specialize in mice for a few days. Later we can buy a supply of rat traps out of our profits.

Starting out at nine-thirty we scattered handbills all over town, handing them to people that we met in the streets and putting them in porch mail boxes. We further gave a copy to each storekeeper.

"Now," says Slats, when we got together at his house right after dinner, "we'll divide the mouse traps and the cheese and call on the trade."

So we started out, each taking a different route. The first house that I stopped at was Mrs. Diccup's.

"Good afternoon, Trigger," says she, when I knocked on her back door. "What are you doing with all the mouse traps? Are you selling them?"

"Mrs. Diccup," says I, "I am one of the Crocketville Sanitary Rat Catcher Company's official rat catchers. And I've called on you to get your order."

She laughed.

"What kind of a joke is this?" says she pleasantly.

When I repeated my words she laughed harder than ever.

"Why, Trigger," says she, "this is the funniest thing I ever heard of. Does your mother know that you have gone into the rat-catching business?"

"No," says I. "I'm planning to surprise her, Mrs. Diccup."

"Well, I venture to say that she'll be surprised, all right. Oh, dear! Do you mind if I laugh again?"

I drew myself up. And it was on the tip of my tongue to tell her, as a sort of rebuke, that she was laughing at a young business man who, some day, was going to have his picture in the *American Magazine*. Then, as I stepped back, what do you know if I didn't skid off the porch. That kind of broke up my dignity and made me mad. I showed it, too, in the way I picked up my mouse traps and cheese.

"Mrs. Diccup," says I haughtily, "you can laugh at me now. But some day when your beautiful home is full of rats and mice you will be glad to send for me to come and catch them for you in sanitary style and with no bad smells like when you poison them."

That sobered her.

"Why, Trigger," says she kindly, "I sup-

pose your scheme is all right, in a way. But, my dear boy, I haven't a mouse on the premises. As for rats, it's been so long since I saw one that I've forgotten what they look like."

That kind of stumped me. I had figured that everybody had rats and mice. I thought they were as common as flies and pimples. But I soon found out, as I went unsuccessfully from house to house, that mice were about as scarce as cats at a dog fight.

Slats and Friday were waiting for me at the corner of Walnut and Peach Streets. And I could tell by their long faces that they had been no more successful than me.

"But we mustn't get discouraged right off," says Slats. "That's no way to win success. We want to have backbone."

"*Your* backbone is all in your head," says Friday, who was beginning to lose confidence in the scheme.

"We may never get rich," says Slats. "But we'll get our money back."

"Let me yell it out loud," says Friday, "that we won't get rich. I bet you that we don't make ten cents, even."

"Anyway," says I, just to say something, "we've got a lot of nice new mouse traps."

"Yah," says Friday, "seven hundred of 'em.

And the ten-cent store has our fourteen bucks."

Slats' temper boiled over.

"Oh, shut up," he glared at Friday. "You make me sick."

Well, we sat there until the leader cooled off.

"I've got a scheme," says he finally.

"Sure," says Friday, sort of yelling it out, "you've got a scheme. You collect schemes like a hairbrush collects dandruff. It was your scheme to buy all these mouse traps. I suppose you've got another scheme to buy more of them."

"If you don't dry up," grinned Slats, "I'll snap one of the traps on your nose."

He then told us about his new scheme. And when we had turned it upside-down, sort of, and squinted at it from all sides, we agreed with him that it was a good scheme. So we got three big cigar boxes, which gave us one apiece (Tail Light, I guess, had trailed off in the direction of town to buy some more peanuts), and headed for the big corncrib near the cooper shop. This corncrib belongs to Mr. Carlton, the man who runs the grain elevator. It is the mousiest corncrib in the whole county. We made a circle of the crib, setting our traps here and there. And when we got back to the first

trap we found a squirming mouse in it. Plop went the mouse into my cigar box.

It took us about an hour to fill our boxes. Then we went back over our routes. Mrs. Diccup was sitting on her front porch fanning herself. Creeping up the steps of her back porch I quietly opened the screen door an inch or two and presented her with an old lunker of a mouse and two small ones. Then I rapped on the door (so that she would be sure to see the mice before they found hiding places) and scooted. Pretty soon I heard her come into the kitchen. Then there was an awful screech.

"I guess the women in this part of town won't be so quick hereafter to tell us that they haven't any mice," says Slats, when I joined him at the corner, after having distributed my mice in the various houses where earlier I had been turned down. There was Mrs. Diccup and Mrs. Potter and Mrs. Baker and a dozen more. They all had mice now. "You'll find," Slats added, "that the women will be tickled pink to get your help."

Again I climbed the back steps of Mrs. Diccup's house, sure this time of getting some business, and rapped on the door. But she wasn't at home. Then I went over to Mrs. Potter's house. But she, too, had gone away. Nor

could I find any of the women at home. That was queer, I thought. Coming within sight of our house I was surprised to see a yardful of women. Mrs. Diccup was there. And so was Mrs. Potter.

Talk about *luck!* The women were so eager for me to catch their mice that they had come over to my house to hunt me up. I broke into a run, eager to get their orders. But instead of giving me an order Mrs. Diccup grabbed me by the shirt collar and shook me till my teeth rattled.

"You young scoundrel," says she. "I'll teach you to put mice in my house." And when she couldn't shake me any more, for want of strength, Mrs. Potter grabbed me by the collar and showed what she could do, which was a plenty. Boy, if anybody in this world ever got a shaking up it was me.

But I finally got away. And now my ma is awfully provoked at me. She made me go to bed without my supper. As I say, I'm very unhappy to-night. It makes me sick to think how some of those mean women said that I was the ringleader and had led Slats and Friday and innocent little Tail Light into temptation. I'll be glad when I'm a man. For a man doesn't get picked on like a boy.

Mr. Crump put an article in his newspaper about our rat company. He made it sound like a big joke. It's a joke, all right. I wish he hadn't published that stuff about us. For now we'll be the laughingstock of the town. Blame it! One unlucky thing always follows another.

I wonder if we'll ever get our money out of those mouse traps. What can a fellow do with seven hundred mouse traps? I wish we could put on a magic stunt and change them into ice cream cones.

Oh! oh! I'm sorry I thought about ice cream cones. It makes me hungrier than ever.

(Later.) Friday just came over to show me a letter that he got from Ted.

"What we thought was phantom smoke," Ted wrote in part, "wasn't smoke at all, but the swamp's haze, visible, against a distant background of trees, through a rift in the nearer trees.

"So that's that. As for old Kamp, he's still counting pennies, afraid, of course, that he'll be one short. I met him on the street to-day and he almost glared a hole through me.

"And here's the best news of all: That geezer who put on the 'ghost' act in the swamp has turned out to be a Chicago millionaire. And having been told that he can buy the island all

in one hunk, the swamp included, he and Mrs. Kelly are now sitting on opposite sides of the fence talking fancy prices. Don't be a bit surprised if you hear that the island has changed hands for fifty thousand dollars."

Alas, Trigger and his pals are soon to learn that there is little "market" for used mouse traps in a town the size of Crocketville. The boys might have disposed of a few of their traps by peddling them from door to door. But having aroused the ire of so many of the neighbors they turn to other methods. Their experiences in disposing of their mouse traps (did they or did they not!), and their further skylarking adventures, combine to make the following book of this new "diary" series one of the funniest that Leo Edwards has written.

The following titles are now on sale:

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree

Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps

OUR CHATTER-BOX

AS THIS new series of books, featuring Trigger Berg and his skylarking pals, Friday, Slats and Tail Light, is intended to strike the fancy or quite small readers, it may be that this initial volume will fall into the hands of many boys and girls who have yet to learn of the countless hours of reading fun contained in my more widely known "Jerry Todd" and "Poppy Ott" books.

For a number of years I have been writing fun-mystery books for boys—books, I might add, that are widely read by girls, too, as the many letters that I receive from girls testify. Just as the distribution of my books has grown, mainly the "Jerry Todd" books, a series now comprising nine volumes, so also has my "fan" mail grown. Boys reading and liking my books write and tell me about it, for somehow they seem to know how dearly I love boys and girls. Many of the letters that I receive are very interesting. Then, too, boy readers frequently ask me questions. Is Jerry Todd a real boy? Is Tutter (where Jerry lives) a real town? Where do I get my story ideas? How long does it take me to write a book? What new books are coming? And so on and so forth.

Now, if I am going to keep on writing books for boys and girls (and I dare say if I stopped I'd be mobbed!) it stands to reason that I can't give personal attention to all of the hundreds of letters that I receive monthly, though I hasten to add that I read and thoroughly enjoy each and every one of these letters, and I do hope, with all my heart, that the readers of my books will keep on writing to me. Such letters, so frank and friendly, inspire me. I need them. Besides, as I say, I'm very fond of boys and girls. So keep up the good work.

You probably can see what I am leading up to—as my "fan" mail increased in

volume I felt the need of some means of answering these letters in a group—in short, I needed some kind of "group" personal contact with my readers—and so, with the kindly permission of my publisher, I created "Our Chatter-Box," which is a feature department appearing, either as a preface or an appendix, in all of my late books.

Our first "Chatter-Box" appeared in *Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem.* I announced then that the department was open to all readers of my books. I would publish outstanding letters from boys, I stated. The second "Chatter-Box" appeared in *Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant,* the third in *Andy Blake's Secret Service.*

This is our fourth "Chatter-Box." If you would like to contribute to this department, please read the preceding "Chatter-Boxes" and thus familiarize yourself with our requirements. Then, too, if you are interested in my story characters you will *want* to read the preceding "Chatter-Boxes," for in them I published some very interesting facts about Jerry Todd, Poppy Ott, Red Meyers, and other well-known story characters.

TRIGGER BERG

TRIGGER is my most youthful story character. And I think he is one of my best! Certainly, he is the liveliest. By the way, I'd like to have you write and tell me what *you* think of him. Will you please do that? And if your letter is interesting I'll try and use it in a future "Chatter-Box." I would recommend these books to readers ranging in age from seven to ten. *Trigger Berg and the Sacred Pig* is now in preparation. The following titles are procurable:

Trigger Berg and the Treasure Tree
Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps

JERRY TODD

STARTING with the "Trigger Berg" books, you will want to become acquainted with the "Jerry Todd" books as you grow older. These books, packed full of fun and mystery—books that hundreds of thousands of live boys have enjoyed—are intended to hold the interest of boys up to fourteen. The following titles are now listed:

Jerry Todd and the Whispering Mummy
Jerry Todd and the Rose-Colored Cat
Jerry Todd and the Oak Island Treasure
Jerry Todd and the Waltzing Hen
Jerry Todd and the Talking Frog

Jerry Todd and the Purring Egg
Jerry Todd in the Whispering Cave
Jerry Todd, Pirate
Jerry Todd and the Bob-Tailed Elephant.

POPPY OTT

THEN comes that hustling young American, Poppy Ott. Poppy is always doing something. In one of his books he started a stilt factory. *Fun?* Yes, sir, these books (slightly older in tone than the "Jerry Todd" books) are packed full of fun. And in each volume there's a spooky mystery, too. The following titles are listed:

Poppy Ott and the Stuttering Parrot
Poppy Ott's Seven-League Stilts
Poppy Ott and the Galloping Snail
Poppy Ott's Pedigreed Pickles
Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish
Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem

ANDY BLAKE

AND here we have a series of books for older boys, as Andy himself is a young advertising man entering his twenties. To date, three volumes have been published:

Andy Blake
Andy Blake's Comet Coaster
Andy Blake's Secret Service

So, as you can see, now that we have introduced Trigger Berg, you can start in reading the Leo Edwards books when you are seven years old and keep on reading them, selecting the series that best matches your growing years, until you are in college.

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

IN 1928 we organized a club called the Secret and Mysterious Order of the Freckled Goldfish. To-day we have upwards of 3,000 members.

Here is how the idea originated: I had just written a book called *Poppy Ott and the Freckled Goldfish.* In the book, Poppy gets up a "lodge" called the Freckled Goldfish. Boy pals of mine, who read the manuscript before I turned it over to the publisher, asked me eagerly if they could get up a local lodge patterned after Poppy's.

Which gave me an idea. Why not get up a club of national scope, open to all Poppy Ott and Jerry Todd fans everywhere.

So we went ahead on that line. We had membership cards printed; and we bought a big book in which to record the names and addresses of all members. Announcing the club in the preface of the "Goldfish" book, we soon heard from boys wanting to join. And now, as I say, we

have a very large (and still growing) membership list.

If you are not a member of our club, I would like to leave the thought with you that we are anxious for you to join. The sole purpose of the club is to provide added fun for boys. So every Trigger Berg, Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fan ought to join.

Each new member receives a unique numbered membership card designed by Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books. Containing a comical picture of Poppy's Freckled Goldfish, together with our secret rules (the picture and the rules are printed on the card), each card also bears my own personal autograph.

Any boy anywhere, old or young, who has a friendly feeling toward Trigger, Jerry and Poppy, is welcome to join. It will cost you four cents in stamps—four one-cent stamps or two two-cent stamps. One red stamp will pay the postage on your membership card; and the other red stamp will partly cover the cost of the envelope and the illustrated card.

In applying for membership please observe these simple rules:

(1) Write (or print) your name plainly.

(2) Supply your complete address.

(3) Give your age.

(4) Enclose two two-cent United States postage stamps, or four one-cent stamps.

(5) Address your letter to

Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

In applying for membership in our club, boys not infrequently make a scribble of their signatures; and then they don't like it because we misspell their names. We do the best we can. And we are very glad to issue corrected membership cards at our own expense in every case where an error is brought to our attention.

But, boys, why not *print* your name and address, if you are a poor writer? It will make it easier for us; and your card will be wholly satisfactory to you.

It is a fact, we get letters of application from boys who forget, even, to supply the name of their town. So what can we do? Nothing. I've often wondered if the fellows who never received their membership cards thought that we were running a kind of skin-game. If you know of a boy who applied for membership, and never received his card, will you please provide his name and address?

LOCAL CHAPTERS

DOZENS of boys have asked if they might organize local chapters, as a part of our national Freck-

led Goldfish club. Permission was granted in each case. And now we have a printed ritual, which any boy who wants to start a Freckled Goldfish club in his own neighborhood can't afford to be without. This booklet tells how to organize the club, how to conduct the meetings, how to transact all club business, and, probably most important of all, how to initiate candidates.

The complete initiation is given, word for word. Naturally these booklets are more or less secret. So, if you send for one, please do not show it to anyone who isn't a Freckled Goldfish. The initiation will fall flat if the candidate knows what is coming. Three chief officers will be required to put on the initiation, which can be given in any boy's home, so, unless each officer is provided with a booklet, much memorizing will have to be done. The best plan is to have three booklets to a chapter. These may be secured (at cost) at six cents each (three two-cent stamps) or three for sixteen cents (eight two-cent stamps).

Address all orders to,
Leo Edwards,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

LETTERS

AND here are a few interesting letters that I received lately. If you have written to me, intending your letter for publication in "Our Chatter-Box," and would like to know if your letter has been published, see the "Chatter-Boxes" published to date. We do not always tell boys that we will publish their letters. So, whenever you see a new "Chatter-Box," grab it and hurriedly look through it.

Your letter may be there!

"Recently," writes Herbert Fog of Flushing, L. I., "Barton Allen and I dragged an old raft out of a creek near where we live. We added to the raft until it would hold three or four easily. Then we set to work making paddles. When this was done we decided to form a club, calling it 'The Black Revenge.' Later on we decided that each member should also be a Freckled Goldfish, which would enable us to combine the rules and signals of both clubs. I will add, too, that we fixed up a big slingshot like the one Jerry and his gang made, only we use stones instead of 'ripe' eggs. Here are the names of the members of our club: Barton Allen, Ferdinand Mayoral, Donald Johnson, Joseph Farrari and myself. We are also making up pirate names for ourselves, like the boys did in *Jerry Todd, Pirate.* Barton is a Boy Scout and Joe is a Boy Pioneer. I am going to send you a picture of our raft."

"The book I like best," writes James Ermler, Chicago, Ill., "is the *Whispering Mummy*. When I read the book I by turns laughed and shivered."

And another chap from Chicago (who forgot to sign his name!) says of the same book: "I was reading the *Whispering Mummy* at night. When I heard a squeak I was scared stiff. I dropped the book and ran to bed and pulled the covers over my head."

"My young son, Stanley," writes Mrs. J. Parke of Chicago, Ill., "is the happy owner of all of your books and is eagerly waiting for more. He has read your books, not once, but many times, and gets a 'kick' out of each reading. It is a wonderful gift to be able to write books which make the children so happy."

Many thanks, Mrs. Parke. I have a great love for boys. So, as you can imagine, it makes me very happy to be able to write books that please them.

"My father has read all of my books," writes Edward Hutshing, San Francisco, Calif., "and says that he likes yours the best."

Thanks, Ed.

"At the end of the *Rose-Colored Cat* book," writes Richard M. Springer of Ambridge, Pa., "Jerry makes the statement that he never wants to see another cat. I like cats, though. One time a cat I had ate some poisoned salmon and is now in its grave sleeping peacefully (I hope). My dad ate some of the same salmon and only got sick, so I think a cat has only half a life, and not nine. Now we have three goldfish and a canary in the house and I can't have a cat."

What are they, Dick?—Freckled Goldfish?

POEMS

IN OUR initial "Chatter-Box," we published a poem contributed by one of our skylarking young readers, rewarding him with an autographed copy of that particular book. Other youthful "poets" were invited to contribute specimens of their creative genius (sounds big, huh?), and of the many poems that we received, good, bad and awful, the following have been chosen for publication.

"My pet turtle died today," writes Marvin Weissburg, 4922 North Spaulding Ave., Chicago, Ill., "so in memoriam I wrote this poem:

Estelle, My Pet

Estelle, my turtle, you are gone
And now you rest in my front lawn.
Just two days a-fore

You were not at all at
Heaven's door.
Now I pray that in peace you
rest—
You have made a friend
at your best.

Bob Steele, 2851 Bauman St., Omaha, Nebraska, submits this one:

Oh, Tutter is a fine town—
The best in Illinois,
That is where we have our
fun,
I and the rest of the boys.

Scoop Ellery is the leader,
Red Meyers a little tot,
Peg Shaw the biggest one
of us,
Me?—Oh, I'm the mascot!

Bill Hadley is the sheriff—
Has an awful homely mug.
But he hasn't anything on me,
For my nose is one big pug.

I've got the finest Dad and
Mother,
And maybe you don't suppose
My Dad is like a regular
clown—
My Mother like a rose.

Brian King, 36 Fairfield St., Springfield, Mass., is the author of this poem:

Have you ever heard of such
a thing
As a Goldfish with a hat?—
And freckles just as big and
large
As a great big lard-filled
vat?

Well, put this in your pipe,
you boys
Who long to have some
fun—
The Freckled Goldfish club is
here
To make you laugh and run.

So take an envelope white
and plain
And put two two-cent
stamps within,
Then address it to Leo Edwards
And your fish career begins.

So hurry up and mail your
stuff
And be the next to join,
For fun is ours and Freckled Fish
Will be your pals from
night till morn.

From Shirley Le Clair, 5143 Potomac Ave., Chicago, Ill., comes this one:

I know a man—
Not by his looks,
But by the way he writes
The "Jerry Todd" books.

Leo Edwards is his name,
And, oh, how he can write!
The "Jerry Todds" and
"Poppy Otts,"
I read with all my might.

And surely Leo Regnier, Jr., 839 Broadway, Chelsea, Mass., deserves a prize for this one:

"We're great totem carvers," cried Red,
As he knicked at the old owl's head.
But 'twas his unlucky day,
For his support gave away,
And he knicked poor Rory, instead!

Each of these five young poets will receive an autographed copy of this book. We can use more good poems. And our original promise still stands: If *you* can write a poem suitable for publication you will receive, as a reward, an autographed copy of the particular volume in which your "masterpiece" appears. So screw down the lead in the old Eversharp, gang, and get busy.

MORE LETTERS

"I THINK the 'Chatter-Box' idea is a pip," enthuses Ted Pearson of Grand Rapids, Michigan, who further says so many nice things about me and my books that I would blush to publish the letter in detail. Ted sure is a real "Jerry Todd" fan, all right—and, of course, a Freckled Goldfish, too.

"Taking you at your word, I have finally interested my grandfather in the Freckled Goldfish club," writes Jack Sperling of Washington, D. C. "His age I cannot disclose, but I trust, even so, that you'll mail him his membership card."

All right, Grandpop, you're one of us. Beware of hooks ornamented with angleworms and don't get your whiskers —I mean your fins—caught in the seaweed.

"About four years ago," writes Walter Kaghan of New York City, "I was in Chicago; but I didn't know about the 'Poppy Ott' and 'Jerry Todd' books then or I would have been over at Lake Ripley before you could say Jack Robinson. I might be over there sometime anyway. I'll stop, for Red Meyers wants a hunk of licorice."

All right, Walt, I'll be looking for you. The only day during the summer that our cottage is closed is on the thirty-second of July.

"I have read many of your books, including 'Andy Blake,'" writes Sydney E. Newman of Philadelphia, Pa. "I think if you would write more books like that it would make a hit."

I expect, Sid, to write one "Blake" book each year. Of course, you do not mean that I should give up Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott, writing only books of the "Andy Blake" type. That would disappoint thousands of smaller boys.

"My ambition is to be an automobile salesman, as I love cars and can give a good 'line' on them," writes James C. C. Barry of St. Albans, L. I. "Once I tried to write a book entitled, 'The

Boy Aviators in the World War,' but, of course, I threw it aside like a boob.''

The main reason why you threw aside your book, Jim, was because you tackled a subject that was too deep for you. Story creation isn't simply ''canned'' imagination. A good writer, if he writes about airplanes, makes a deep study of them; if he specializes in war stories he draws on his own experiences. It would be next to impossible for an inexperienced boy to write a convincing story about the use of airplanes in warfare. The next time that you have the ''urge,'' tackle a simpler subject. There is just as much romance, you know, in your own ball ground, as there is in foreign battle grounds.

''When I was sick with the flu,'' writes Warren Jaynes, Ravinia, Ill., ''my pa bought me the *Tittering Totem* book. It sure was a great book and I think the 'Chatter-Box' idea is the same. In the back of the book you stated that the next in the series would be *Poppy Ott and the Prancing Pancake*. So right off I figured that Poppy put fleas in the pancake batter.''

No, Warren, Poppy didn't put fleas in the pancake batter. As a matter of fact, Poppy's pancakes, of themselves, do no prancing. They are very well behaved pancakes in every way. ''The Prancing Pancake'' is the name of Poppy's little pancake restaurant.

By the way, I'm working on that book now. And one of the chief characters is an old goof by the name of Sir Hinkle Funnyduster—at least that is the name he gives the boys. He has a pet turtle named Davey Jones. Plenty of possibilities for fun, hey?

''I think your 'Chatter-Box' idea is swell,'' writes Merrell Crawford, Jr., Chicago, Ill. ''My mother has an old Chatter-Box (1887) in which is contained the serial, 'The Young Moose Hunters,' that you mentioned. But so old and worn is the book that every time I get to a good part I find several pages gone.''

You're lucky, Merrell, to have, in your family, a Chatter-Box that old. I have one (1885) that I wouldn't sell for many times what it cost.

And here's what another boy says about Chatter-Boxes:

''The 'Chatter-Box' idea, I think, is a hum-dinger,'' writes Bill Bond, York, Pa. ''I have a couple of those books that my dad had when he was a boy.''

Other boys have written to me, endorsing the ''Chatter-Box'' idea, among them Dick McDuffee, Indianapolis, Ind., Fernard Maybarduk, Brooklyn, N. Y. and Robert Irwin, Wollaston, Mass.

''So many of my pals talk about joining your Freckled

Goldfish club,'' writes Marion Corcoran of New York City, ''that I feel sort of left out. I want to join, too.''

''I have been reading your books since 1924,'' writes Kenneth Ford of Kansas City, Mo. ''I first saw your stories in a Sunday School magazine and since then I have recommended your books (I have fifteen of them) to my friends. And can you tell me when the 'Trigger Berg' books will be published?''

It's easy to answer your question, Kenneth—Trigger Berg is here!

VISITORS

AT THE time this book goes to press the trees in Wisconsin are just beginning to show their leaves. It is cold and cheerless on the lake in front of our cottage, so naturally we see few people around here; and naturally, too, I have had few out-of-town callers.

But here are a few names that I want to include in this volume:

Bill and John Marx of Milwaukee—also from the same city, Jean, John, Bob, Paul and Neal O'Connor and Bertyl Andren. Oh, yes, I mustn't overlook Arthur and Jimmy Davidson, and Art's cousin, Bob Davidson.

Myron Monsen of Delafield, Wisc., (the home of the famous St. John's Military Academy) called to see me when I was away from home. I was more fortunate, though, in seeing his younger brother, Gordon, of Chicago. Accompanying Gordon were Logan Anderson and Howard (Whitey) Neil, also of Chicago.

John and Norma Voss drove in one Sunday from Beloit; and the same day Lyle, Byron and Joyce White of Waterloo stopped to see us.

Donald Bray and Jimmy George of Oglesby, Ill., were here one week-end in April. And, of course, the Cambridge boys and girls are here every day—some of them, at least. Two patrols of Boy Scouts came out one Saturday afternoon and did we ever have a swell ''weenie'' roast! Um-yum! Red Vold ate seven—or was it seventeen? Out-of-town people who meet him always inquire if he is Red Meyers!

MORE LETTERS

WHY don't you write a 'Jerry Todd' book in which the action takes place in the winter?'' writes Richard Corrigan of Rockford, Ill. ''Have the Strickers weaken the ice on the canal and then have Red fall in. Let Cap'n Tinkertop go fishing through a hole and get his peg-leg frozen in the ice. The gang works four hours chopping him out, etc.''

Well, Dick, I can't promise to carry out your detailed

suggestions, but I *will* promise you (and 'steen hundred other "Jerry Todd" fans) that shortly we'll have an all-winter story in which Jerry and his gang go to Oak Island (where a new mystery has developed) to tap the maple trees there and make maple syrup. How does that "listen" to you?

Donald Bailey of Peepskill, N. Y., writes to much the same point.

"Doesn't Jerry Todd do anything in the winter time?" is Don's inquiry. "I should think he could have lots of fun building snow forts and having snow battles with the Strickers."

"And when the totem pole actually tittered—was that ever spooky!" writes Moran Jones of Kansas City, Mo. "I could almost hear the tittering myself. I could smell the rotten tomatoes, too—those tomatoes, I mean, that Poppy and his gang threw at Bid Stricker's gang—because my mother was canning tomatoes that day. The Strickers sure must have got it when they got home."

Not having a boat, George Nelles of Kansas City, Mo., couldn't name it *The Tittering Totem.* But he reports in a recent letter that he did give his bicycle that name.

"Here are three questions I'd like to ask you," writes Fred Amann of Chicago, Ill. "Are you going to write more 'Jerry Todd' and more 'Poppy Ott' books? How long does it take you to write such a book? Is Jerry Todd in the 'Andy Blake' books?"

It is my intention, Fred, to write at least twenty "Jerry Todd" books, and probably the same number of "Poppy Ott" books. The writing of such a book takes me from two to three months, though I wrote the "Freckled Goldfish" book, under pressure, in forty-seven days. Jerry is not (as yet!) in the "Andy Blake" books.

"I wish you would put Peg and Scoop in all of the 'Poppy Ott' books," writes Willis Potthoff of Brentwood, Mo., "because, to my notion, the books are incomplete without them."

Instead of having the same boy characters in all my books *all* the time, I've been bringing in new characters, feeling that this would give the books desirable variety. Take Rory Ringer. He has, in a way, supplanted Peg and Scoop in some of my recent books. Other new characters will be introduced from time to time. And, of course, we will have some stories in which the "old gang" is featured.

And here's a letter from a girl—Marion Stenholm, Rockford, Ill.—who says she was laughed at by other girls in her class when she told the teacher (who had asked the pupils what books they liked the best) that *her* fa-

vorite books were the "Jerry Todds."

"But now," concludes Marion, "having read one of my books, the girls want 'Jerry Todd' instead of 'Little Red Riding Hood.'"

Another girl—Eleanor Baldwin, Middletown, Conn.—brings up a point that I want to touch on briefly.

"Perhaps," writes Eleanor, "you won't permit girls to join your Goldfish club, because in the books Poppy and Jerry detest girls. I was reading a book the other day called the Knights of the Round Table; and I thought at the time that Jerry, Red, Peg, Scoop and Poppy were something like Knights."

I'm mighty sorry if the girl readers of my books, like Eleanor, have the feeling that Poppy and Jerry detest girls. For that is not true at all. If Jerry speaks of girls lightly in his stories, or if he tells how Red dodges them, it is because the boys are bashful around girls.

Poppy and Jerry have the utmost respect for women, especially elderly women. And if it became their duty to escort a girl friend to a party, or some such gathering, I can assure you that they would be very gentlemanly, indeed. As Poppy and Jerry grow up they will develop an interest in girls. But just now they are small boys. So let them be small boys.

If the girls who read my books want to know how nicely I can write of girls, I would refer them to *Andy Blake's Secret Service.* There is a most delightful girl character in this story. And the "hero" is greatly attracted to her, too.

And having thus published two letters from girl "fans," suppose we make it a "trio" and see what Betty Weier of Indianapolis, Ind., has to say.

"I don't think it's fair," writes Betty, "for you to give all of your attention to the boys, because some girls are just as jolly as boys, only girls, of course, must be little ladies and not climb trees. I have (red) read most of your 'Jerry Todd' and 'Poppy Ott' books and would like to be a member of your Goldfish club. Girls can keep secrets, too. Oh, yes, please tell Red that I have a few freckles."

Do you hear that, Red? You aren't the only one with spots on your beak. Just to demonstrate how impartial we are with our membership cards, we not only duly inscribed Betty's name in our official book, but we have given her permission to organize a chapter of her own. So now, you hard-boiled guys (meaning you, too, Red Meyers!), if you get too fresh we'll send you down to Indianapolis for a *real* initiation—and we'll tell Betty to put on all of the frills.

By the way, Trigger has a goat in the second book of

this series. The goat gets sick and they give it Peruna. Then, when the goat recovers its pep (its name is Dynamite), they use it in an initiation that you'll never forget.

And here is a story that I received from Dorothy Blimke of Elmhurst, Ill., a dandy little pal of mine:

A LOVE STORY

ONCE upon a time there was a girl named Alice who always went out with a man named Jimmy. He always called her up and asked her to go to a theater called the Marbro. But one time she refused him and he got very mad. So he never called her up any more.

So one time she went over to his house and asked what was the matter. He didn't answer. So she gave him a kiss on his cheek. He looked up and said:

"You are mine!"

So they went to the minister's house and got married. Soon they had a little baby boy. Jimmy went to work and earned lots of money and bought a big house in Hollywood with Spanish shawls hanging on the banisters. The little boy's name was Bob. They loved him very much.

Soon Alice's mother came to visit them. Little Bob made funny faces at Alice's mother. Alice and Jimmy lived happily ever after.

* * * * * *

And that is all for this time. Watch for more letters and announcements in the fifth "Chatter-Box," which will be published in *Trigger Berg and His 700 Mouse Traps.*

This Isn't All!

Would you like to know what became of the good friends you have made in this book?

Would you like to read other stories continuing their adventures and experiences, or other books quite as entertaining by the same author?

On the *reverse side* of the wrapper which comes with this book, you will find a wonderful list of stories which you can buy at the same store where you got this book.

Don't throw away the Wrapper

Use it as a handy catalog of the books you want some day to have. But in case you do mislay it, write to the Publishers for a complete catalog.

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POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH
POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM
POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE
POPPY OTT HITS THE TRAIL

THE TRIGGER BERG BOOKS

TRIGGER BERG AND THE TREASURE TREE
TRIGGER BERG AND 700 MOUSETRAPS
TRIGGER BERG AND THE SACRED PIG

THE TUFFY BEAN BOOKS

TUFFY BEAN'S PUPPY DAYS
TUFFY BEAN'S ONE RING CIRCUS
TUFFY BEAN AT FUNNY-BONE FARM
TUFFY BEAN AND THE LOST FORTUNE

GROSSET & DUNLAP, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

THE REX LEE FLYING STORIES

By THOMSON BURTIS

Illustrated. Every Volume Complete in Itself.

The author of this series of exciting flying stories is an experienced aviator. He says, "During my five years in the army I performed nearly every sort of flying duty—instructor, test pilot, bombing, photographing pilot, etc., in every variety of ship, from tiny scout planes to the gigantic three-motored Italian Caproni."

Not only has this author had many experiences as a flyer; a list of his activities while knocking around the country includes postal clerk, hobo, actor, writer, mutton chop salesman, preacher, roughneck in the oil fields, newspaper man, flyer, scenario writer in Hollywood and synthetic clown with the Sells Floto Circus. Having lived an active, daring life, and possessing a gift for good story telling, he is well qualified to write these adventures of a red-blooded dare-devil young American who became one of the country's greatest flyers.

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